

Why Alicia Keys Refuses to Cancel Her Tel Aviv Concert

Award-winning musician Alicia Keys told the *New York Times*, “I look forward to my first visit to Israel. Music is a universal language that is meant to unify audiences in peace and love, and that is the spirit of our show.” The Simon Wiesenthal Center has praised Keys’ as “courageous,” for coming to Israel to perform despite public pressure to do otherwise. Keys’ is considered one of the most successful pop singers, with her albums selling over 35 million copies and having 14 Grammy Awards to her name.

Alice Walker, the author of the *Color Purple*, wrote an open letter to Keys, stating, “It would grieve me to know you are putting yourself in danger (soul danger) by performing in an apartheid country that is being boycotted by many global conscious artists.” She also compared the Israeli regime to the apartheid system that used to exist in the American south, even going as far as claiming that Israel is worse than what Jim Crow used to be.

Walker has a long record of anti-Israel activism behind her name. She visited Gaza in 2008; is actively involved with the BDS Movement at the University of California at Berkeley, which recently passed a BDS motion; and refused to have the *Color Purple* translated into Hebrew, citing political motivations. She also was a supporter of the Gaza Freedom March and the Gaza Flotilla. Additionally, Walker has opposed Israeli participation in the Toronto Film Festival.

Yet Walker was not the only person to put pressure on Keys. Musician Roger Waters also encouraged Keys to cancel her performance in Tel Aviv, inviting Keys to “join the rising tide of resistance,” and noted that “nothing has changed since the bad old days of apartheid South Africa and Segregated

America. We must stand united with all our brothers and sisters against racism, colonialism, segregation and apartheid.” Despite that fact that the BDS movement implemented a social media campaign designed to pressure Keys, she did not change her decision.

Not an Apartheid State

Rabbi Marvin Hier, the dean and founder of the Simon Wiesenthal Center said that, “Equating Israel with apartheid South Africa is a sinister distortion of the truth.” Freedom House, a non-governmental organization that conducts research and advocacy on democracy, political freedom, and human rights, ranks Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East. The rights of Israeli Arabs are protected by Israeli law and none of the elements that existed in apartheid South Africa exist in the State of Israel today . A South African MP Rev. Dr. Kenneth Meshoe, a person of color who survived the apartheid policies of South Africa said recently, “I am shocked by the claim that the free, diverse, democratic state of Israel practices apartheid. This ridiculous accusation trivializes the word apartheid, minimizing and belittling the magnitude of the racism and suffering endured by South Africans of color.”

In regards to making peace, Hier added that “Israel has said countless times that it is willing to sit down with the Palestinians without pre-conditions. But Israel cannot be expected to make peace with Hamas, a terrorist organization committed to Israel’s destruction, just as African-Americans cannot make peace with the KKK.”

He pointed to “what is happening in Iran, Syria, Lebanon and Egypt” as examples for how it is impossible to have peaceful relations with Islamists dedicated to Israel’s destruction.

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