



Struggle-La-Lucha.org

Artists and speakers protest SXSW festival over defense sponsors, Gaza war

written by Al Jazeera
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Haitian American rapper Wyclef Jean performs at the 2022 SXSW festival in Austin, Texas.

Dozens of acts scheduled to appear at the South by Southwest (SXSW) festival in the United States have withdrawn in an act of protest against sponsors with ties to Israel's war in Gaza.

As of Wednesday, at least 80 artists and panelists have pulled out of the nine-day festival, citing the involvement of several weapons companies and agencies tied to the US Department of Defense, according to the Austin for Palestine Coalition, which helped organize the protest.

The event, billed as a "convergence of tech, film, music education and culture", is

among the most prominent entertainment festivals in the southern US.

Taking place each year in Austin, Texas, the festival has been a launchpad for up-and-coming indie acts and filmmakers since its opening in 1987. This year's festival will conclude on March 16.

But several artists slated to appear this year have withdrawn, in an effort to show solidarity with the people of Gaza.

"I have decided to pull out of my official SXSW showcases in protest of SXSW's ties to the defense industry and in support of the Palestinian people," musician Ella Williams, who is known as Squirrel Flower, posted on Instagram on March 4.

https://twitter.com/Lambrini_Girls/status/1766550399069081805

The Austin for Palestine Coalition identified Williams as one of the first nine acts to withdraw as part of the protest.

Ibrahim Batshon, the founder of the BeatStars digital production company, posted a day later on social media that artists associated with his organization would also boycott the festival, which attracted over 345,000 people last year.

He cited the involvement of Raytheon and BAE Systems, two of the companies involved in this year's SXSW festival.

"Both of these companies manufacture and provide weapons to the terrorist state of Israel, whom is currently conducting an internationally condemned genocide against an occupied and besieged population of Palestinians," Batshon posted.

However, the boycott has since expanded to include featured speakers like labor union organizer Chris Smalls and musicians like Buffalo Nichols.

The advocacy organization United Musicians and Allied Workers has also thrown its

support behind the protest, echoing its [rallying cry](#) on social media: “Warmongers have no place at SXSW!”

We will not be appearing at [@sxsw](#) festival. □ [pic.twitter.com/nt5hEMH2GM](#)

— KNEECAP (@KNEECAPCEOL) [March 10, 2024](#)

In announcing its withdrawal this week, Northern Ireland hip-hop trio Kneecap highlighted the costs small acts would incur by missing the high-profile event.

“This decision will have a significant financial impact on Kneecap, both on lost income and on logistical costs already incurred,” the trio said in a statement. “But it isn’t an iota of hardship when compared to with the [unimaginable] suffering being inflicted every minute of every day on the people of Gaza.”

As of Wednesday, at least 31,272 Palestinians had been killed in Israel’s operations in Gaza, the vast majority of them women and children, according to local authorities. The fighting has left the enclave on the [brink of famine](#), with human rights groups accusing Israel of slowing the delivery of humanitarian aid.

The administration of US President Joe Biden has continued to pledge political and material support to Israel despite issuing stronger criticism of its military campaign in recent weeks.

“There are a lot of innocent people who are in trouble and dying,” Biden said last month. “And it’s got to stop.”

Governor responds: ‘Don’t come here’

The growing SXSW boycott effort, however, prompted a rebuke on Tuesday from Texas Governor Greg Abbott.

“We are proud of the US military in Texas,” he wrote on social media. “If you don’t like it, don’t come here.”

In late February, the Austin Chronicle also reported that SXSW organizers sent a cease-and-desist letter to the Austin for Palestine Coalition as they sought to rally support for the boycott.

The letter said the group had used trademarked SXSW art in their social media posts and threatened legal action, according to the news site.

Still, the festival defended the artists who chose not to participate in this year’s festival, [responding](#) directly to Governor Abbott’s comments.

“SXSW does not agree with Governor Abbott,” SXSW wrote on social media on Tuesday. “We fully respect the decision these artists made to exercise their right to free speech.”

In the same thread of messages, however, SXSW also attempted to justify its ties to the [defense industry](#).

“The defense industry has historically been a proving ground for many of the systems we rely on today,” the festival wrote in its [statement](#). “These institutions are often leaders in emerging technologies, and we believe it’s better to understand how their approach will impact our lives.”

The Austin for Palestine Coalition and the United Musicians and Allied Workers Union are set to host a protest show in Austin on Thursday.

Source: [Al Jazeera](#)

