

Statement from the Dance Community in Canada | Déclaration de la communauté de la danse au Canada

(la version française suit à la page suivante)

ENGLISH VERSION

Please sign at the end

We, members of the newly formed Canada Dancers for Palestine collective and members of the dance community in Canada, have come together recognizing our moral responsibility as artists to stand in solidarity with the people of Palestine. We grieve for the tens of thousands of lives violently ended, the orphaned children, those starving, traumatized, brutalized, imprisoned and forcibly displaced.

We pledge our support for the Palestinian people in the face of over 75 years of Israeli apartheid, settler colonialism, military occupation, and ethnic cleansing.

In the light of this, we find it deeply troubling that major Canadian dance presenters intend to present *Minus 16*, a work choreographed by Ohad Naharin, an Israeli-state-funded choreographer, including:

- **Harbourfront Centre in their upcoming Torque 2023/2024 programme, April 18th – 20th at the Fleck Dance Theatre, Toronto;**
- **Grand Théâtre de Québec on April 22nd at the Salle Louis-Frédéric, Quebec City;**
- **Centre culturel de l'Université de Sherbrooke on April 30th at the Salle Maurice-O'Bready, Sherbrooke City;**
- **Danse Danse on May 1st – 4th at the Théâtre Maisonneuve, Place des Arts in Montreal;**
- **Danse Danse also intends to present *Kamuyot*, another work choreographed by Ohad Naharin, an interactive performance for children and teenagers, April 24th – 26th at the Gymnasium of the Trafalgar School in Montreal;**

École de danse contemporaine de Montréal's graduating students performance presented by Tangente on May 22nd – 25th at l'Espace Orange of the Wilder building in Montreal.

For over 75 years, the people of Palestine have been subjected to ethnic cleansing, massacres, dispossession, displacement, collective punishment, siege and now genocide. Despite being found to be plausibly causing genocide by the International Court of Justice,

Israel has made clear its intention to continue to violate international law. Palestinian human rights are systematically violated with impunity by Israel.[1]

The WHO reports that a child is killed on average every 10 minutes in Gaza.

By that calculation, while Canadian audiences watch *Swan Lakes* and *Minus 16*, 12 children in Gaza will have lost their lives.

While Canadian children interact with and watch *Kamuyot* in Montreal, 12 Palestinian children will have lost their lives.

Since October, at least 30,000 people have been killed by Israeli forces in Gaza. Nearly 70,000 have been injured. 17,000 children are unaccompanied. Over 2 million Palestinians in Gaza are at imminent risk of forced starvation, and lack access to clean water, healthcare and the conditions necessary to life. Humanitarian convoys are being attacked by Israeli strikes, killing foreign aid workers delivering much needed food to Gaza.[2]

For decades, Israel has targeted Palestinian dance, preventing dancers from accessing education, banning dance performances and touring, intimidating, imprisoning and torturing dance artists[3]. A long-standing policy of shoot to maim[4 & 5], focusing on lower limbs, has created mass disabilities and a generation of amputees. The rights to bodily integrity and freedom of expression which we take for granted as dancers in Canada are denied to our Palestinian colleagues. We ask: How many dancers, choreographers, and those children aspiring to be, have been maimed, murdered or displaced by Israeli violence?

Against the backdrop of all of this, we find it unconscionable that Harbourfront Centre in Toronto, the Grand Théâtre de Québec, the Centre culturel de l'université de Sherbrooke and Danse Danse in Montreal, completely disregard the widespread evidence of Israel's artwashing campaign, in which choreographer Ohad Naharin is deeply complicit. He has, his entire career, accepted funding from the Israeli government and he continues to benefit from the existing Apartheid regime. He is a former IDF soldier and has employed former and serving IDF members in the Batsheva Dance Company. *Minus 16* itself is an amalgamation of extracts of earlier choreographies Naharin created for and on Batsheva, with funding by the Israeli state[6]. Harbourfront Centre, the Grand Théâtre de Québec, the Centre culturel de l'université de Sherbrooke and Danse Danse, in platforming this prominent Israeli artist whose choreographic work is funded by Israel, are therefore participating in normalizing and promoting Brand Israel[7] and its human-rights violations.

We note that the Israeli government explicitly funds Israeli dance and arts organizations as propaganda tools to show the "prettier face" of Israel[8] and to divert international attention from Israeli human rights violations.

No amount of fancy footwork can sidestep the amorality of presenting *Minus 16* and *Kamuyot* while Israel commits genocide.

Palestinian civil society has issued a call for the academic and cultural boycott of Israel modeled on the successful boycott of apartheid South Africa. Respecting that call, we, as dance artists and activists, are compelled to take a stand against these performances which are nothing short of hugely insensitive at this time.

We call on Harbourfront Centre, the Grand Théâtre de Québec, the Centre culturel de l'Université de Sherbrooke and Danse Danse to remove *Minus 16* and Danse Danse to remove *Kamuyot* from their upcoming performance programmes performed by the Gauthier Dance//Dance Company Theaterhaus Stuttgart ensemble.

Palestinian and Arab dancers are members of our community and have made important contributions to dance in Canada. Their experiences and identities have inspired choreographers who have used their personal stories in their works. Staying silent in the face of the ongoing genocide makes us bystanders and denies our Palestinian and Arab colleagues dignity and safety.

As a dance community, in a cultural sector where too many have not spoken, we stand in solidarity with Palestinians and raise our voices. We believe that humanity, dignity and life should, and must come before art.

We appeal to all dance artists and workers, dance organizations, companies, festivals and institutions across Canada to join us in signing this statement.

We note that many dance and art organizations publicly expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people on Russia's invasion of Ukraine[9]. We urge them to refrain from adopting double standards in responding to situations of oppression. Silence is not neutral.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion policies are symbolic at best, empty and meaningless at worst if we cannot recognise and speak out against the crimes against humanity, the oppression and genocidal actions that are being committed right now. We have an ethical responsibility to defend the human rights of the oppressed.

No more business as usual in the Arts. End the Silence.

No more artwashing.

Further information on Ohad Naharin:

Ohad Naharin is the former Artistic Director and current House Choreographer of Israel's foremost dance company, Batsheva. The company is based in the Suzanne Dellal Centre in Yafa (Jaffa), surrounded by ethnically cleansed former Palestinian neighbourhoods. He is a former IDF soldier and employs former IDF soldiers within his company. If reservists, they will have been called up to serve in Israel's genocide of Gaza. Naharin has verbally criticized the occupation and this has been used in his defense, but actions speak louder than words. His dance company has consistently been identified by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as one of Israel's greatest cultural ambassadors and he continues to this day to benefit from the regime. Apartheid is seen in practice in that Batsheva has no Palestinian dancers and the majority of Palestinians (who all live under Israeli occupation and control), cannot access his company, either as dancers or audience members.

Context

This statement was modelled after Apartheid Free Dance's statement in Ireland in response to Ballet Ireland's programming of Minus 16, with their permission. The action taken by Apartheid Free Dance led to the successful removal of Minus 16 from the program at Ballet Ireland.

References

- 1 <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/26/israel-not-complying-world-court-order-genocide-case>
- 2 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/02/gaza-aid-convoy-strike-what-happened-and-who-were-the-victims>

3 <https://www.outlookindia.com/international/a-dancer-in-gaza-is-always-at-risk-of-arrest-magazine-339310> ; <https://israelpalestinenews.org/dancing-while-palestinian-administrative-detention-palestinian-culture/>

4 <https://english.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/137270>

5 <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/press-releases/israel-deliberate-attempts-military-kill-and-maim-gaza-protesters-continues>

6 <https://batsheva.co.il>

7 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brand_Israel

8 "We see culture as a propaganda tool of the first rank, and I do not differentiate between propaganda and culture." Nissim Ben-Sheetrit, Israeli Foreign Ministry, 2005 - Source: <https://artistsforpalestine.org.uk/why-israel/israel-cultural-wars/>

9 [National Ballet of Canada](#) ; [ImpulsTanz](#) ; [Bernilale](#) ; [Venice Biennale](#) ; [Opéra national de Paris](#)

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לא בשיתוף 

ניקוי הטופס

הבא

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