

## **An urgent call from artists and curators of the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia 2026**

*In refusing the spectacle of horror, the time has come to listen to the minor keys, to tune in sotto voce to the whispers, to the lower frequencies; to find the oases, the islands, where the dignity of all living beings is safeguarded.*

*In Minor Keys, Curatorial Statement by Koyo Kouoh, 2025*

We are artists and curators invited to the 61st International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia by Koyo Kouoh. As cultural workers and human beings raised and based in a multiplicity of localities around the globe, we express our solidarity with all people subject to rising forms of systemic oppression, inequalities and erasure, including genocide and ethnic cleansing in Palestine, Sudan and Myanmar, as well as rampant violence, occupation and war in Cameroon, Congo, Cuba, Iran, Kashmir, Lebanon, Moçambique, Ukraine, Venezuela and too many other places. This is the world we live in, it is the world we make our work in, and it is the larger context within which the 61st Biennale will be seen and received.

We are committed to an active decolonial practice of anti-racist politics and human rights which is embedded in our work. We speak up in resistance to increased repression, censorship, and policing of cultural and intellectual spaces.

Specifically, we have come together to object to the decision by La Biennale to exceptionally relocate the Israeli pavilion in the Arsenale. To insert the Israeli pavilion into spaces alongside the main exhibition, *In Minor Keys*, conceived by Koyo Kouoh, intrudes upon and goes directly against Kouoh's curatorial vision, her curatorial statement, and the principles of *Radical Solidarity* she articulated so clearly in all her work. This will also introduce conditions of violence and fear through the military and police presence that will accompany the Israeli pavilion. This concerns us directly as artists in the exhibition. On March 13, 2026 we requested that La Biennale revoke this decision.

La Biennale has made a statement of neutrality and we submit in response that allowing governments that are actively committing war crimes, atrocities and genocide to participate is not neutral. A community of nations can only exist if states are sanctioned when they egregiously violate international law and human rights. As the largest and most visible art event in the world, a position taken by La Biennale has enormous impact. While it may be beyond the power of an exhibition to bring justice to all our concerns, there are ethical lines that can be drawn, and actions that cannot be normalized.

The UN Independent International Commission of Inquiry determined that Israel has committed genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, and this same determination has been made in multiple assessments by the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS), Human Rights Watch, and leading Israeli human rights organizations B'Tselem and Physicians for Human Rights, Israel. The atrocities committed by the Israeli government are well-documented, as is the structural and systemic apartheid regime of brutal attacks, killings and illegal

annexations of land. The arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 21 November 2024 for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is still in place. While these crimes are ongoing it is unconscionable for La Biennale to accommodate an Israeli pavilion.

The UN also reported on the direct complicity of other nations:<sup>1</sup>

*The ongoing genocide in Gaza is a collective crime, sustained by the complicity of influential Third States that have enabled longstanding systemic violations of international law by Israel. Framed by colonial narratives that dehumanize the Palestinians, this live-streamed atrocity has been facilitated through Third States' direct support, material aid, diplomatic protection and, in some cases, active participation.*

La Biennale has chosen to exclude national pavilions in the past based on their unilateral military aggression or apartheid regimes. While certain exclusions (of South Africa 1968-1993, Russia 2022-2024) were made on the basis of international sanctions, La Biennale has also taken other positions when circumstances demanded. Notably, in 1974, La Biennale stood in solidarity with the people of Chile; all national pavilions were closed and the 1974 edition renamed itself "Freedom to Chile; for a democratic and anti-fascist culture".

La Biennale established another compelling precedent with its 2022 statement excluding official Russian participation.<sup>2</sup>

*For those who oppose the current regime in Russia there will always be a place in the exhibitions of La Biennale. [...] As long as this situation persists, La Biennale rejects any form of collaboration with those who [...] have carried out or supported such a grievous act of aggression, and will therefore not accept the presence at any of its events of official delegations, institutions, or persons tied in any capacity to the Russian government.*

We believe these principles hold true today, that they apply to Israel, Russia and the United States. There is a threshold beyond which participation in La Biennale should not be normalized. As in 2022, the current conditions demand that La Biennale di Venezia exclude any official delegation from current regimes committing war crimes, including Israel, Russia, and the United States.

The continuing absence of a Palestinian pavilion only heightens the inequality implicit in the accommodation of the Israeli pavilion.<sup>3</sup>

We call on the President and the management of La Biennale to join us in making Biennale Arte 2026 a place where, as Koyo Kouoh wrote, "the dignity of all living beings is safeguarded."

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/unispa/document/special-rapporteur-report-gaza-genocide-a-collective-crime-20oct25/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.labiennale.org/en/news/la-biennale-di-venezia-ukrainian-pavilion-biennale-arte?>

<sup>3</sup> Palestine has been recognized as a sovereign state by 157 of 192 UN member nations, Israel by 163.

## **Signatories**

1. Alice Maher
2. Carolina Caycedo
3. Vera Tamari
4. Hagar Ophir
5. Avital Barak
6. Sohrab Hura
7. Yoshiko Shimada
8. Rachel Fallon
9. Florence Lazar
10. Carrie Schneider
11. Nolan Oswald Dennis
12. Alan Phelan
13. Mohammed Joha
14. Uriel Orlow
15. Natalia Lassalle-Morillo
16. Hala Schoukair
17. Gala Porrás-Kim
18. Alfredo Jaar
19. Thania Petersen
20. Sofía Gallisá Muriente
21. rana elnemr
22. Himali Singh Soin and
23. David Soin Tappeser
24. Pio Abad
25. Anonymous artist
26. Yo-E Ryou
27. Anonymous artist
28. BuBu de la Madeleine
29. Tabita Rezaire
30. Cauleen Smith
31. Fabrice Aragno
32. Rasha Salti
33. Gabe Beckhurst Feijoo
34. Joana Hadjithomas and
35. Khalil Joreige
36. Mohammed Z. Rahman
37. Alexa Kumiko Hatanaka
38. Guadalupe Rosales
39. Nina Katchadourian
40. Kemang Wa Lehulere
41. Sabian Baumann
42. Anonymous artist
43. Walid Raad
44. Marigold Santos
45. Rajni Perera
46. Bonnie Devine
47. Annalee Davis
48. Éric Baudelaire
49. Buhlebezwe Siwani

50. Guadalupe Maravilla
51. IONE for Pauline Oliveros
52. Raed Yassin
53. Anonymous artist
54. Anonymous artist
55. lugar a dudas
56. Amina Saoudi
57. Anonymous artist
58. Johannes Phokela
59. Rory Tsapayi
60. Anonymous artist
61. Carrie Yamaoka
62. Joy Episalla
63. Zoe Leonard
64. fierce pussy
65. Anonymous artist
66. Ayrson Heráclito
67. Berni Searle
68. Anonymous artist
69. Theo Eshetu
70. Anonymous artist
71. Nancy Brooks Brody Estate
72. Edouard Duval-Carrié
73. Denniston Hill