

Israel bars violinist from Gaza peace concert

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Famed conductor Daniel Barenboim spoke out against Israel Monday, following the refusal of the Israeli authorities one day earlier to allow a prominent Palestinian violinist to pass through the Erez border crossing and perform in a peace concert in the Hamas-controlled Gaza strip.

At a press conference in Berlin on Monday, the South American-born Jewish conductor expressed his "deep dismay at this blatant discrimination against a Palestinian musician, which prevented the orchestra from performing this vital humanitarian act for the people of Gaza."

Ramzi Aburedwan, founder of the non-profit Al Kamandjati Association to promote music among the Palestinian people, was supposed to have performed with a 20-piece international orchestra as part of a Baroque Music Festival currently taking place throughout Israel and the Palestinian territories, supported by the Barenboim-Said Foundation, the General Consulate of France in Jerusalem, the A.M. Qattan Foundation, and the Goethe Institute of Ramallah.

However, while the 19 other musicians were allowed to cross into Gaza, Aburedwan was denied entry. Even though the others were permitted to pass, they refused to continue in a show of solidarity with their fellow musician.

"The group had all secured security clearance in coordination with the Israeli authorities via the General Consulate of France in Jerusalem to enter Gaza," wrote Aburedwan in a statement.

The Defense Ministry's Gaza Coordination Liaison Administration (CLA) dismissed Barenboim's allegations and said that Aburedwan, a resident of Ramallah, had not coordinated his visit to Gaza with Israel and did not have the necessary permits.

According to CLA Spokesman Capt. Shadi Yassin, French diplomats drove Aburedwan from Ramallah to the Erez crossing even though they knew that his travels outside the West Bank were not authorized. Yassin said that while Aburedwan was detained at Erez,

the rest of the orchestra was given permission to enter Gaza and on their own decided to turn around and return to Ramallah.

Lt.-Col. (res.) Shlomo Saban, a Defense Ministry official based at the Erez border crossing, told *The Jerusalem Post* that while the other members of the orchestra had been cleared to enter the strip, Aburedwan alone had arrived without the necessary paperwork.

"He was not registered in our system as having the correct permits," Saban told the *Post*, adding that after the group was informed that Aburedwan could not enter, they became extremely angry and disrupted business at the crossing for more than five hours.

A spokesman for Aburedwan said that the musician was taken to an Israeli police station in Sderot for questioning, where he was held for two hours. Saban confirmed this.

On Monday, the orchestra held the concert in Ramallah in a show of solidarity with residents of Gaza, who they say are suffering because of "Israeli measures of collective punishment and isolation, including fuel and electricity cuts and crippling border closures, which have caused massive levels of poverty and unemployment."

Barenboim, an Israeli citizen, joined together with the late Palestinian intellectual Edward Said to form the Barenboim-Said Foundation in 2004. The non-profit organization aims to promote peace, dialogue and reconciliation, primarily through music. It also provides financial support to musicians from the region.
