# Ncuti Gatwa withdraws from Eurovision jury role amid Israel protests and heightened tensions



Mystery surrounds the sudden withdrawal of Ncuti Gatwa from the UK’s Eurovision results showcase, which is set to take place tonight in Basel, Switzerland. The 32-year-old actor, known for his role in Doctor Who, was initially slated to deliver the UK's jury scores. However, just 48 hours before the event, Gatwa stepped aside, citing "unforeseen circumstances." The timing of his withdrawal has raised eyebrows, particularly as it came shortly after Israel qualified for the grand final, intensifying ongoing debates surrounding the country’s participation in the contest amid rising tensions related to the conflict in Gaza.

The BBC confirmed Gatwa’s absence, and singer Sophie Ellis-Bextor has been appointed to take his place. This development follows a day filled with demonstrations during rehearsals, where protesters supporting Palestine disrupted Israel’s representative, Yuval Raphael, who is also a survivor of the Hamas terror attack that occurred earlier this month. Organisers faced criticism over how peacefully they could manage the event, leading to heightened security measures, including the banning of bags and the execution of thorough security protocols to prevent interference.

The controversy surrounding Israel's involvement in Eurovision this year has been escalating, with anti-Israel protests gaining traction ahead of the finals. As demonstrated during the rehearsals, audience members attempted to express their dissent by disrupting performances. In response, the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) has established stricter measures to ensure the event remains apolitical, despite the ongoing protests that have sparked debates about the rationale behind Israel's participation, especially after the EBU banned Russia following its invasion of Ukraine.

Calls for Israel’s exclusion from the contest have gained significant momentum, with over 70 former Eurovision contestants, including the UK's 2023 entrant, Mae Muller, signing an open letter advocating for reconsideration of Israel's inclusion. Notably, last year's winner, Nemo, expressed that "Israel’s actions are fundamentally at odds with the values Eurovision claims to uphold." Meanwhile, the EBU has reiterated that its decision to allow Israel to compete stems from an intention to maintain a non-political stance during the event, further complicating discussions about the nature of cultural showcases in the face of pressing global issues.

Expectations for the contest remain high, despite the backdrop of protests. More than 300,000 fans are anticipated to arrive in Basel for what is a major cultural event. Yet, the atmosphere will undoubtedly be clouded by the ongoing turmoil in the region, with heightened security concerns in light of the geopolitical conflicts that permeate the competition.

As the contest airs live tonight on BBC One, with Girl band Remember Monday representing the UK, the spectre of social and political tensions looms large over the event. The outcome and public reception of the performances may yet further illuminate the interplay between politics and artistic expression in a platform as visible as Eurovision.

### Reference Map

1. Core focus on Ncuti Gatwa's withdrawal and its implications.
2. Details on the protests against Israel's participation and security measures enforced.
3. Quote from last year's winner regarding Israel's actions and Eurovision values.
4. Context of Israel's qualification and Deutsche Broadcasting Union's stance.
5. Public dynamics surrounding the Eurovision event and contest participation risks.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thesun.ie/tv/15221002/eurovision-ncuti-gatwa-withdraws-bbc/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.apnews.com/article/e484340e9d33ba5fb3926e10a668c86a> - Israel's participation in the 2025 Eurovision Song Contest in Basel, Switzerland, has sparked ongoing controversy and protests, primarily due to its military actions in Gaza following Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack. Israeli singer Yuval Raphael, a survivor of that Hamas attack, has maintained a low profile during the competition but successfully qualified for the final with her song “New Day Will Rise.” Despite her personal connection to the violence, anti-Israel demonstrations have been held, with protesters questioning why Israel is allowed to compete when Russia was banned after invading Ukraine. Security measures were enforced after activists attempted to disrupt Raphael’s rehearsal, and there are continued calls from former contestants and some national broadcasters for Israel’s exclusion. The European Broadcasting Union defends Israel’s participation, emphasizing the contest’s apolitical stance and that Israel is represented by its national broadcaster, not its government. Supportive demonstrations for Israel and against antisemitism have also taken place. The controversy highlights growing tensions over political issues within ostensibly non-political cultural events like Eurovision.
3. <https://time.com/6976082/eurovision-performers-palestinian-symbols/> - The 68th Eurovision Song Contest in Malmo, Sweden witnessed controversy as performers wore pro-Palestinian symbols, leading to reprimands from organizers. Opening act performer Eric Saade wore a kaffiyeh, a symbol of Palestinian solidarity, on his wrist, while Irish contestant Bambie Thug originally had 'Ceasefire' and 'Freedom for Palestine' written in Ogham script on their face and legs. The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) insisted on keeping the event apolitical and admonished both for their actions. Saade, of Palestinian descent, defended his choice as a cultural expression, while Bambie Thug changed their makeup as requested but expressed their support for justice and peace. This year’s contest faces heightened scrutiny and security amid ongoing controversy over Israel's participation, with widespread pro-Palestinian protests expected during the final rounds.
4. <https://apnews.com/article/23304985ecffe31100968b020dfc23f3> - Eden Golan, a 20-year-old Israeli singer competing in the Eurovision Song Contest in Malmo, Sweden, is navigating heightened security and mixed receptions amid pro-Palestinian protests. The conflict between Israel and Hamas, which began with a deadly Hamas raid in October and led to significant casualties, has fueled protests against Israel's Eurovision participation. Golan, subjected to boos and applause, performed under tight security and has avoided public appearances outside rehearsals and performances. Despite the tense atmosphere, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu commended her resilience. Golan’s song 'Hurricane,' formerly 'October Rain' until contest rules necessitated a name change, resonates with themes of enduring love and overcoming hardships.
5. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/04/20/malmo-prepares-for-a-high-tension-eurovision-contest_6669021_4.html> - Malmö is bracing itself for what may be one of the most controversial Eurovision contests in history, set against the backdrop of the Gaza war. From May 3-12, the Swedish port city expects 100,000 visitors amidst high tension, protests, and calls for boycotts. Swedish police, aided by Danish and Norwegian reinforcements, are preparing for a heightened threat level, with demonstrations and a possible Quran burning anticipated. The participation of Israel, amidst allegations of genocide in Gaza, has sparked significant debate. Thousands of Nordic and British artists have called for Israel’s exclusion, leading to several Scandinavian artists withdrawing from the event. Pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli groups have scheduled demonstrations, highlighting the deep divisions within Malmö, where a significant portion of the population hails from the Middle East. Despite fears of further politicization, event organizers and local authorities hope Eurovision can proceed without incident.
6. <https://www.ft.com/content/97a5c7c4-3596-44ed-9eca-1213cfbcc118> - Eurovision organisers are preparing for pro-Palestinian protests in Malmö, Sweden, in response to Israel's participation in the contest amidst its offensive in Gaza. Israel's contestant, Eden Golan, qualified for the finals, intensifying political tensions with thousands planning protests. Protests already included actions by climate activist Greta Thunberg. Heavily armed police are deployed to manage expected large crowds. Israel's participation has led to online abuse and social media backlash against artists, with incidents like Irish contestant Bambie Thug being asked to remove pro-Palestinian body paint. Controversies include historical exclusions and criticisms of allowing political motives, with Eurovision maintaining its stance as a unifying musical event. The EBU, defending its non-political stance, also remarked on the difficulty of comparing conflicts following Israel's exclusion calls similar to prior Russian bans. Malmö's local dynamics, including tensions from antisemitic incidents and anti-Islam activism, exasperate the situation further.
7. <https://time.com/6975697/eurovision-security-palestine-protests/> - The 68th Eurovision Song Contest in Malmo, Sweden, has heightened security due to anticipated protests against Israel's participation. Performers from Europe and beyond compete, with around 100,000 fans expected. It comes amid increased threats globally and specifically in Sweden, which raised its terror alert following Quran-burning incidents in August 2023. The contest, seen by over 150 million people worldwide, maintains an apolitical stance, banning most flags except national and pride flags inside the venue. Despite organizers urging Israel to change its song lyrics referencing Hamas' attack, the Israeli entry will be performed under a new title, 'Hurricane.' Protests are set for the second semi-final and the final, while no specific threats were reported against the contest.