# John Legend defends Rwanda concert amidst DR Congo conflict backlash



American singer-songwriter John Legend has recently addressed the controversy surrounding his decision to perform in Rwanda amidst ongoing conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo). Speaking to the BBC, Legend expressed that he is unperturbed by the backlash resulting from his concert in Kigali, where he headlined the Move Afrika event, organised by the Global Citizen NGO.

During his remarks, Legend stated, "I don't believe that we should punish the people of Rwanda and punish the people of other countries when we disagree with their leaders." His performance comes during a period of heightened tension, as M23 rebels, reportedly backed by Rwanda, have captured major cities in the eastern DR Congo. The conflict has tragically displaced hundreds of thousands of civilians, leading to a significant increase in violence, including instances of sexual violence against minors.

Despite the criticism that Legend faced, particularly concerning the potential moral implications of performing in a nation currently entangled in a war, he defended his role in the event. Legend clarified that he did not receive payment for his performance and felt compelled to support efforts to enhance touring opportunities across Africa, a region he noted is frequently overlooked by international music artists. "I'm aware of what's happening [in DR Congo] and I'm aware of the calls there have been for me to not do this show, but I really believe that the mission of Move Afrika is still important," he shared with the BBC following his performance.

The event attracted a large audience and was met with enthusiasm from many attendees. However, the social media backlash was significant, prompting Legend to remove an promotional post from his Instagram account. Prominent figures, such as Belgian activist Denise Zanesa, voiced strong opinions against his choice to perform, suggesting that it equated to complicity with oppression. Additionally, some critics, including Simone Umba in the US, noted the use of Black American culture by the Rwandan government as a means of soft power to divert attention from its actions in the eastern DR Congo.

This incident is not the first time Legend has faced scrutiny for his public engagements. Known for his political activism, he has been an outspoken critic of former US President Donald Trump and has distanced himself from his former mentor Kanye West due to concerns over the impact of West's political ambitions on African American voter participation.

Rwanda has faced allegations of "sportswashing," a term used to describe attempts by countries to improve their international image while suppressing dissent domestically, notably through its sponsorship ties with high-profile sports teams in Europe. Legend's team opted not to comment on this aspect when prompted by the BBC, reinforcing the view that his artistic work would serve as a more pertinent form of expression.

As the situation in the region evolves, the intersection of global music and politics remains a contentious topic, with performances like Legend's continuing to provoke debate among fans, activists and observers alike.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://hrf.org/latest/open-letter-to-john-legend/> - This URL supports the claim that John Legend faced criticism for his decision to perform in Rwanda, with the Human Rights Foundation urging him to cancel his concert due to the country's involvement in the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
2. [https://www.tiktok.com/@morextiandela/video/7474249075530009911](https://www.tiktok.com/%40morextiandela/video/7474249075530009911) - This TikTok video discusses the replacement of Tems with John Legend for a concert in Rwanda amid ongoing conflict, highlighting the controversy surrounding his performance.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news> - This URL would typically provide news coverage of John Legend's interview with the BBC, where he discussed his decision to perform in Rwanda despite the backlash.
4. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/2/m23-rebels-capture-key-city-in-eastern-dr-congo> - This article supports the claim of heightened tension in the DR Congo due to M23 rebels capturing major cities, which is relevant to the context of John Legend's performance in Rwanda.
5. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/jun/29/rwanda-sportswashing-arsenal> - This article discusses Rwanda's allegations of 'sportswashing' by improving its international image through sports sponsorships, which is mentioned in the context of Legend's performance.
6. <https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/21/entertainment/john-legend-rwanda-concert/index.html> - This CNN article would likely cover John Legend's concert in Rwanda and the controversy surrounding it, providing additional context to his decision to perform.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cly8nzpwnn4o> - Please view link - unable to able to access data