# Pro-Palestinian protests demand RTÉ and BBC boycott Eurovision over Israel’s participation



Several pro-Palestinian demonstrators gathered recently outside the BBC studios in Belfast, expressing their discontent with the corporation’s coverage of the ongoing conflict in Gaza. As part of their protest, activists banged dustbin lids and called for a boycott of the Eurovision Song Contest, which is set to feature Israel, amidst claims of "culturewashing" by Israel’s national broadcaster, KAN. The Eurovision Song Contest will commence in Switzerland on May 13, with the grand final following on May 17.

The protest at BBC in Belfast mirrors a similar demonstration in Dublin, where scores of activists, including well-known actor Stephen Rea, assembled outside RTÉ’s headquarters. Attendees showcased Palestinian flags and held up banners with slogans such as “you can’t culturewash genocide.” Rea recited the poignant poem "If I Should Die" by Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer, who fell victim to an Israeli air strike, highlighting the emotional weight of the gathering.

Organised by the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC), the Dublin protest aimed to urge RTÉ to withdraw from broadcasting the Eurovision contest in light of Israel's inclusion. According to the IPSC, over 70 former Eurovision contestants have backed their calls to exclude Israel from the competition. During the demonstration, which also featured a mini-concert of anti-war songs, the chairwoman of the IPSC, Zoe Lawlor, drew parallels to Ireland's historical stance against the apartheid regime in South Africa, stating, "It’s vital to exclude the genocidal apartheid state of Israel from this global cultural platform now."

Despite the pressure from demonstrators, RTÉ’s director general, Kevin Bakhurst, confirmed that the broadcaster would not withdraw its entry, which features the Laika Party performing a song by singer Emmy. However, he expressed a desire to discuss Israel's participation with the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), chaired by Irishman Noel Curran, indicating the complexities of the situation.

The response from political leaders has been mixed. Taoiseach Leo Varadkar has publicly opposed calls for an Irish boycott, arguing that such actions would not only be counterproductive but could potentially alienate liberal voices within Israel, undermining efforts toward peace. He emphasised the need for engagement rather than exclusion, advocating for a collaborative approach to promote human rights across the region.

This discourse around the Eurovision contest touches on broader themes of cultural representation and political dissent, revealing deep societal divides on issues of international solidarity. As the protests unfold, the stakes are not just about a music competition but reflect the ongoing discourse surrounding human rights, political expressions, and the intersection of culture and activism.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1-2: [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/eurovision-boycott-by-bbc-and-rte-and-called-for-in-belfast-and-dublin-protests-WGM4T72XDFJZ3BMAUNLBO474EI/)
2. Paragraphs 3-4: [[2]](https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2024/05/02/protesters-call-for-rte-to-boycott-eurovision-during-demonstration-outside-studios/), [[3]](https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2024/0502/1447061-eurovision-protest/)
3. Paragraph 5: [[4]](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41317984.html), [[5]](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41296948.html), [[6]](https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/12/25/varadkar-opposed-to-boycott-by-ireland-of-eurovision-over-israels-participation/)
4. Paragraph 6: [[7]](https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2024/05/02/protesters-call-for-rte-to-boycott-eurovision-during-demonstration-outside-studios/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/northern-ireland/eurovision-boycott-by-bbc-and-rte-and-called-for-in-belfast-and-dublin-protests-WGM4T72XDFJZ3BMAUNLBO474EI/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2024/05/02/protesters-call-for-rte-to-boycott-eurovision-during-demonstration-outside-studios/> - On May 2, 2024, approximately 100 activists, musicians, and actors gathered outside RTÉ's Donnybrook headquarters in Dublin to protest Israel's participation in the Eurovision Song Contest. The demonstration featured chants, Palestinian and Irish flags, and a mini-concert. Actor Stephen Rea read the poem 'If I Should Die' by Palestinian poet Refaat Alareer. The Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC) called for RTÉ to withdraw from broadcasting the event, citing concerns over Israel's actions in Gaza. RTÉ confirmed its intention to proceed with coverage, emphasizing the non-political nature of the contest. ([irishtimes.com](https://www.irishtimes.com/ireland/2024/05/02/protesters-call-for-rte-to-boycott-eurovision-during-demonstration-outside-studios/?utm_source=openai))
3. <https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2024/0502/1447061-eurovision-protest/> - On May 2, 2024, protesters gathered outside RTÉ headquarters in Donnybrook, Dublin, calling for a boycott of the Eurovision Song Contest due to Israel's participation. The demonstration, organized by the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign (IPSC), included a 'die-in' by health workers and featured performances by artists such as Mary Coughlan and Liam Ó Maonlaí. IPSC spokesperson Zoe Lawlor emphasized the need to exclude Israel from the contest, drawing parallels to Ireland's past stance against apartheid South Africa. RTÉ stated it would continue its coverage, highlighting the contest's non-political nature. ([rte.ie](https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2024/0502/1447061-eurovision-protest/?utm_source=openai))
4. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41317984.html> - In December 2023, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar expressed opposition to Ireland boycotting the Eurovision Song Contest over Israel's participation. He argued that such a unilateral boycott would be counterproductive, stating it would 'ostracise' liberals within Israel and hinder efforts for peace. Varadkar emphasized the importance of engaging with all parties to promote human rights and a two-state solution. His comments came amid calls from various groups and politicians for Ireland to withdraw from the contest due to Israel's involvement. ([irishtimes.com](https://www.irishtimes.com/politics/2023/12/25/varadkar-opposed-to-boycott-by-ireland-of-eurovision-over-israels-participation/?utm_source=openai))
5. <https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41296948.html> - In December 2023, Taoiseach Leo Varadkar opposed calls for Ireland to boycott the Eurovision Song Contest over Israel's participation. He stated that such a unilateral boycott would be counterproductive, potentially 'ostracising' liberals within Israel and hindering efforts for peace. Varadkar emphasized the importance of engaging with all parties to promote human rights and a two-state solution. His comments came amid calls from various groups and politicians for Ireland to withdraw from the contest due to Israel's involvement. ([irishexaminer.com](https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-41296948.html?utm_source=openai))
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