# Thom Yorke brands Netanyahu an extremist amid backlash over Gaza silence



In a recent and impassioned statement, Thom Yorke, lead singer of Radiohead, described Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as an “extremist” who “needs to be stopped.” The remarks come in the wake of significant criticism directed at Yorke for his perceived silence regarding the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Following months of turmoil, Yorke issued an eight-page commentary that not only condemned Netanyahu's actions but also highlighted the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Yorke’s comments surfaced after a notably tense incident during a solo concert in Melbourne, where he was heckled by a pro-Palestinian activist. The protester drew attention to the rising death toll in Gaza, asserting that many victims included children. Footage from the concert showed Yorke pausing his performance to engage with the protester, only to later leave the stage briefly. Upon returning, he sang Radiohead’s iconic track “Karma Police.” This interaction exemplified the mounting pressure on public figures to openly address contentious political matters, particularly in the face of activism.

In his detailed statement, Yorke articulated the distress caused by being labelled complicit due to his silence. He expressed his feelings of being trapped between the need for respectful acknowledgment of the crisis and the external pressures demanding immediate condemnation. “That silence, my attempt to show respect for all those who are suffering and those who have died… has allowed other opportunistic groups to use intimidation and defamation to fill in the blanks,” he noted. This reflective tone indicates the emotional toll that public expectations can impose on artists grappling with complex socio-political landscapes.

Moreover, Yorke’s comments are reflective of a broader concern shared by many, including leaders in Europe. German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has echoed similar sentiments, stating that Israel's military actions can no longer be justified as counter-terrorism due to their harsh impact on civilians in Gaza. This illustrates a growing unease within the political arena about the implications of unreserved support for Israel amidst international scrutiny.

Yorke has faced considerable backlash for his decision to perform in Israel back in 2017, dismissing claims that playing in a country equates to endorsing its government. He underscored that the band has historically performed in various countries governed by different leaders and stressed, “We don’t endorse Netanyahu any more than Trump.” However, such justifications are increasingly questioned, with critics arguing that this perspective could overlook the broader human rights implications tied to performances in conflict zones.

In a world increasingly galvanised by calls for accountability, Yorke's stance represents a microcosm of the tensions faced by artists today. While he aims to strike a balance between artistic expression and political responsibility, the public remains divided. With a growing chorus advocating for the cessation of violence and greater humanitarian support—reflected in comments from various activists and political figures alike—the pressure on public figures to take clear stances on such conflicts intensifies.

Yorke’s vision for an engaged international community that holds leaders accountable is resonant in today’s climate, marked by a resurgence of activism and a demand for transparency and compassion in times of strife. His journey through the complexities of public commentary amidst a humanitarian crisis may reflect not only his personal struggles but also the broader dilemmas faced by many in the arts who seek to navigate these turbulent waters while fostering understanding and dialogue.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/thom-yorke-calls-netanyahu-an-extremist-who-needs-to-be-stopped-after-being-criticised-for-silence/a1101696304.html), [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yrv2zyd22o)
* Paragraph 2 – [[5]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yrv2zyd22o), [[6]](https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/radiohead-sings-against-authoritarianism-but-refuses-to-condemn-war-on-gaza-18227200)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/d9bc5232-f7c7-47aa-9ef6-649b310c345b), [[4]](https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/3/16/play-in-israel-just-dont-pretend-you-didnt-know)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://pitchfork.com/news/thom-yorke-on-radiohead-israel-concert-we-dont-support-netanyahu-any-more-than-trump/), [[6]](https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/radiohead-sings-against-authoritarianism-but-refuses-to-condemn-war-on-gaza-18227200)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/thom-yorke-calls-netanyahu-an-extremist-who-needs-to-be-stopped-after-being-criticised-for-silence/a1101696304.html), [[2]](https://www.ft.com/content/d9bc5232-f7c7-47aa-9ef6-649b310c345b)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://m.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/thom-yorke-calls-netanyahu-an-extremist-who-needs-to-be-stopped-after-being-criticised-for-silence/a1101696304.html> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.ft.com/content/d9bc5232-f7c7-47aa-9ef6-649b310c345b> - German Chancellor Friedrich Merz has strongly criticised Israel's actions in Gaza, stating they can no longer be justified as counter-terrorism. Despite his longstanding support for Israel, Merz expressed deep concern over the humanitarian impact of the military campaign, particularly on civilians. His remarks highlight growing unease within Germany about its unwavering support for Israel amid international condemnation. Other German officials have echoed his concerns, advocating for halting arms exports to Israel and addressing the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.
3. <https://pitchfork.com/news/thom-yorke-on-radiohead-israel-concert-we-dont-support-netanyahu-any-more-than-trump/> - Thom Yorke, lead singer of Radiohead, addressed criticism over the band's decision to perform in Tel Aviv, Israel, in 2017. He stated that playing in a country isn't the same as endorsing its government, emphasising that they don't endorse Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu any more than they do former U.S. President Donald Trump. Yorke highlighted the band's long history of performing in Israel through various governments, some more liberal than others, and defended their decision to play in Israel.
4. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2024/3/16/play-in-israel-just-dont-pretend-you-didnt-know> - An opinion piece criticising Thom Yorke's rationale for performing in Israel, arguing that his justification of playing in a country not equating to endorsing its government overlooks the broader context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The author contends that Yorke's stance fails to acknowledge the systemic issues and human rights violations associated with Israel's actions, suggesting that artists should be more mindful of the political implications of their performances.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c5yrv2zyd22o> - During a solo concert in Melbourne, Australia, Thom Yorke paused his performance after being heckled by a pro-Palestinian protester. The protester shouted about the 'Israeli genocide of Gaza' and the death toll, including children. Yorke addressed the heckler, inviting him to come on stage and express his views directly. After a brief departure from the stage, Yorke returned to perform Radiohead's 'Karma Police.' This incident highlights the ongoing tensions surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the expectations placed on public figures to take a stance.
6. <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/radiohead-sings-against-authoritarianism-but-refuses-to-condemn-war-on-gaza-18227200> - An analysis of Thom Yorke's response to pro-Palestinian protests during Radiohead's performances, particularly focusing on his reaction to calls for the band to condemn Israel's actions in Gaza. The piece examines Yorke's previous statements defending the band's decision to perform in Israel and contrasts them with the current situation, questioning the band's position on the conflict and their reluctance to publicly condemn the war in Gaza.
7. <https://pitchfork.com/news/radiohead-the-smiles-thom-yorke-leaves-stage-in-response-to-pro-palestine-protestor/> - Thom Yorke, frontman of Radiohead and The Smile, left the stage during a solo concert in Melbourne after being heckled by a pro-Palestinian protester. The protester shouted about the death toll in Gaza and accused Yorke of silence on the issue. Yorke invited the protester to come on stage and express his views directly, leading to a brief departure from the performance. This incident underscores the challenges artists face when addressing politically charged topics during public events.