

Eurovision contest kicks off with protests against Israel's genocidal war on Gaza

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Malmo, May 8 (RHC)-- The Eurovision Song Contest 2024 has kicked off in Sweden with pro-Palestine protests and calls for boycott as the Israeli regime continues its genocidal war against the besieged Gaza

Strip.

The first semi-final of the event began in the Swedish city of Malmo on Tuesday, with Palestinian-Swedish singer Eric Saade wearing a black-and-white keffiyeh around his wrist in the opening act of the show.

Eric, whose father is a Palestinian from Lebanon, appeared on stage with the Palestinian headscarf tied to his arm during his performance of "Popular" song. The 33-year-old singer said that by participating in the opening act while wearing a Palestinian keffiyeh on his wrist he would be protesting Israel's participation in the event.

"When you can no longer wear a symbol of your ethnicity in our so-called 'free world' it's even more important for me to participate," he wrote in a post on Instagram last month.

The European Broadcasting Union (EBU) reacted to the move, saying "we regret that Eric Saade chose to compromise the non-political nature of the event." It added that "the Eurovision Song Contest is a live TV show and that all performers are made aware of the rules of the contest."

Michelle Roverelli, head of communications for the EBU, also noted that the organizers of the annual competition had earlier announced that they have the right to prohibit any Palestinian flag and pro-Palestine symbols from the performance, with ticket holders only permitted to carry and display flags of nations that are participating in the event.

Israel is set to participate in the event with the song "Hurricane", previously titled "October Rain", in apparent reference to the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas's October 7 attacks, which organizers deemed too political.

In the run-up to Eurovision, more than 1,000 Swedish artists demanded a ban on Israel but their calls were rejected.

Security is tight in Sweden's third-largest city, which expects an influx of some 100,000 Eurovision fans, along with tens of thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters.

The biggest protests are expected on Thursday, when Israel's Eden Golan will appear in the second semifinal of the competition with her song "Hurricane."

Mohammed Ghannam, a member of the Swedish arm of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement based in Malmo, said there have been protests at least twice a week in the city since the start of the genocidal war on Gaza.

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