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The Arab American "Disgrace" Committee

Published: Friday, June 10, 2011, 5:01 PM Updated: Sunday, June 12, 2011, 11:22 PM



By Dr. Aref Assaf/NJ Voices

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How ironic if not oxymoronic that an organization whose middle name is "anti-discrimination" is silencing a song about freedom. **UPDATE: ADC just changed it mind!** and my follow up **letter** to ADC's president

I am not surprised that ADC, the self described "largest Arab American civil rights organization" is acting in a manner contrary to the aspirations of its members. In an article in Politico, ADC, the American Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, decided abruptly to disinvite a Syrian artist, Malek Jandali, who was set to perform a pro democracy song at its annual convention taking place this weekend in Washington, DC. One song in particular, titled "Watani Ana", My Homeland, never talks politics and never utters the word Syria or Arab. Yet the singer refused ADC's request not to sing it prompting their decision to bar him from participating in the convention. Malek posted on his Facebook page the following:

"It is with deep sadness that I announce that I will no longer be performing at the annual ADC Convention this weekend in Washington, DC. This is the result of their unfortunate decision to prohibit me from performing "Watani Ana: I am my Homeland". I look forward to sharing my music live with my wonderful fans soon. Thanks to all of you who have supported me in this and all my musical ventures."

In a shameful press release issued following the Politico article, ADC danced around the hollow argument that their "resolution not to promote any particular side of a dispute is misunderstood". And that they do not wish to engage in 'domestic' issues affecting the Arab world." I wonder who wrote the statement for it reminds me of the liar who actually believes his lies. By so doing, ADC has irreversibly disconnected itself from the Arab Spring sweeping the Arab World. It has in effect sided with the enemy of the people, with those despots who have robbed our land of its wealth and the people of their dignity and honor.

ADC has shown its true colors. While some will argue the charges of conspiracy are too harsh, it is undoubtedly clear that ADC has not fully comprehended the implications of its actions.

Unable to gain 'grassroots' acceptance and funding, ADC has over the last several years turned its hands to Arab billionaire and dictators. It started with the several million ADC got in return for honoring the flamboyant playboy Prince Al-Waleed Bin Talal founder and CEO of Kingdom Holding Properties. Astoundingly, this year's convention was underwritten by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and the UAE- regimes that have shun any democratic moves.

Understandably, not taking sides with Arab issues was another excuse ADC in 1991 when its leadership refused to oppose the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and the subsequent US led war to liberate Kuwait. That decision all but dried up critical financial support from the Gulf States.

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ADC has become the sick man of the Arab American community due largely to the rise of other ethnic and religious organizations. It began with the split led by James Zogby who in 1985 founded the American Arab Institute. AAI has by and large done a commendable job at gauging the Arab street and conveying its message. The derailment of ADC, however, would continue unabated in the 1990's when CAIR, the Council on American Islamic Relations came into being folloed by several other country-specific groups such as the Muslim Public Affairs Council, The American Task Force on Palestine and the American Task Force on Lebanon. Even with the unprecedented post 9/11 onslaught on American Arabs and Muslims civil and religious rights, ADC was slowly losing its monopoly on being the spokesman for and the defender of the besieged community.

I have served under ADC's banner for many years and have devoted precious hours to promote its core mission: to serve the interests of the American Arab community. It was not a perfect relationship but here in New Jersey we were able to accomplish unprecedented and unrepeated strides in fulfilling its declared mission. It, however, would have to await another occasion to uncover my personal encounters.

The decision to remove a pro democracy performer from their convention's program was a great miscalculation. While speculations abound about the special relationship between the Syrian regime and ADC' Chairman, Dr. Rifka, what matters most is that the decision was taken in the name of the national organization. Unless immediately reversed, it shall remain a sham on ADC's long and proud history of serving the interests of the community. ADC will forever be associated with the enemy of people in the Middle East. ADC cannot have it both ways. Either you are with the people's calls for freedom or you are with the dictators, the oppressors, the enemies of our people.

I call upon all members to make their positions knows by contacting ADC national office at: 1732 Wisconsin Ave, NW Washington, D.C. 20007, Phone: (202) 244-2990, Fax: (202) 333-3980, adc@adc.org . Please send your comments to ADC president, Sara Najjar Wilson at president@adc.org

I further call upon those members who were planning to attend this weekend's convention to cancel their attendance. And this call applies specially to the speakers who have accepted to participate in the convention.

Finally, I think it is appropriate that ADC Board Chairman, Dr. Safa Rifka must step down. The salvation of ADC may then begin.

Here is the link to the song in question: <http://youtu.be/fjqR7H6YumE>

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geo8440

June 10, 2011 at 6:21PM

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An interesting development. Did not expect Arab American organizations to be first funded by foreign entities and secondly agreeing with the polices of undemocratic leaders. ADC should apologize, reinvte the singer and move on. The song is really harmless.

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About Me



Abu Kareem

As physicians, we are taught to "first, do no harm". And so, in

life, I like the middle road, where reason prevails over the harm that is the inevitable result of ignorance, prejudice and intolerance.

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Saturday, June 11, 2011

A Man of Principle: Malek Jandali vs ADC



The Arab American Anti-discrimination Committee (ADC) is an organization created to safeguard the civil and human rights of Arab-Americans. This weekend is their yearly convention. Malek Jandali, the noted composer and pianist of Homs origin was to perform at the convention. He was to perform his new song *Watani Ana* (my homeland is me), a universal call for freedom and dignity. Although Syria is not explicitly mentioned in the lyrics, given his background, it is clear what *Watan* he is referring to; and yet the lyrics are gentle and non-confrontational. The ADC asked him to choose another piece to perform at the convention. He refused and when the ADC would not give in, he walked away.

The ADC's explanation for its action just does not hold any water. They are an organization that strongly promotes the human and civil rights of Arab Americans. They cannot claim to be apolitical and feign neutrality when it comes to human rights abuses in the Middle East because they take a clear stance in on the Palesinian-Israeli conflict. What they did with Jandali is hypocritical and outrageous.

I have been a card carrying ADC member for several years now but will reconsider my membership if the ADC does not change course. They can either limit their mission to civil rights issues in the US, or be an independent voice for human rights for all Arabs. To achieve the latter, they will have to assert their independence from Arab regimes.

As for Malek Jandali, I salute him as a man of principle and a Syrian patriot. In his gentle, civil way, he continues to advocate for the Syrian people at every chance that he gets.

Posted by Abu Kareem at 8:52 AM

2 comments:

Anonymous said...

I didn't see any clear apology to Malek Jandali nor to the American-Arab community! Also, where is the public invitation to invite Malek Jandali to perform his freedom 'song' *Watani Ana*?

3:50 PM



Abu Kareem said...

Apparently, ADC just reversed its decision and Malek Jandali will open the ADC convention with *Ana Watani!* Wise move. http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0611/ADC_reverses_decision.html

5:00 PM

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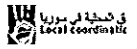
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June 11, 2011

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ADC reverses decision

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee **has reversed** (http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0611/ADC_confirms_blocking_free) an earlier decision to disinvite a Syrian-American composer from singing a pro-democracy song and will open its gala with his song.

An ADC staffer told POLITICO that musician Malek Jandali was now invited and that the organization had apologized to him.

Jandali had first been asked to change his choice of song that he was due to play at the ADC's annual gala, and then was dropped as a musician.

"We regret the series of events that led to the cancellation of Mr. Jandali's performance," said the ADC in a statement. "We hope that by playing the song, with its powerful message of freedom, that we will address the valid concerns of many in the Arab-American community. It is in this spirit we hope to move forward and continue to build our grassroots network, as we work to empower Arab Americans."

"Playing the video is not going to make people who didn't come to this event turn around," said comedian Dean Obeidallah at a panel on social media, when the news was announced. "It's going to take more than that."

Full statement after the jump.

ADC announced today that it will open its annual Gala with the playing of the song "Watani Ana" by Syrian composer and pianist Mr. Malek

Jandali.

We regret the series of events that led to the cancellation of Mr. Jandali's performance.

We hope that by playing the song, with its powerful message of freedom, that we will address the valid concerns of many in the Arab-American community. It is in this spirit we hope to move forward and continue to build our grassroots network, as we work to empower Arab Americans.

ADC's mission as a civil rights organization will be advanced by being a broad umbrella that represents the whole community. We encourage the participation of all Arab Americans as a vital way of continuing to build, and improve our ability to defend our rights. It is regrettable that this issue has been emphasized by some to detract from the important work that ADC does and from its message conveyed at its annual convention. ADC has gained its Arab-American community's trust by being active and fair and has worked diligently to protect their rights.



Posted by Byron Tau 12:11 PM

Tags: **American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee**

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PRESS RELEASE - BREAKING NEWS - MALEK JANDALI MAKES ADC DEFENDANT IN US FEDERAL COURT

by Arab Americans for Democracy in Syria on Wednesday, August 17, 2011 at 11:31am

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MALEK JANDALI SUES ADC OVER COPYRIGHT INFRINGEMENT

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- August 17, 2011 -- A federal copyright infringement lawsuit was filed today on behalf of award-winning composer and pianist Malek Jandali. The suit, filed in the U.S. District Court of Washington, D.C., alleges that the American Arab Anti Discrimination Committee (ADC) illegally played an audio recording of Jandali's performance of "Watani Ana" at its national convention on June 11, 2011.

The lawsuit claims the recording was played without Jandali's authorization or consent, and after the ADC revoked his invitation to perform at the event.

"We are confident that we have a solid copyright infringement case," said Stuart P. Ross, a partner with Troutman Sanders LLP, the law firm representing Jandali.

In April 2011, Jandali composed the music and the lyrics for "Watani Ana," which translates to "I am my homeland" in Arabic. He produced and released the song as a universal call for freedom, dignity and human rights. The ADC then invited Jandali to perform at the June event.

But as Politico magazine previously reported, "The ADC, a Washington civil rights group, repeatedly asked Malek Jandali to reconsider his piece choice . . . When he refused, Jandali was told that he couldn't perform at this weekend's event. Observers immediately speculated that the organization wanted to avoid offending the embattled Syrian regime, drawing a chorus of criticism."

Jandali said that after ADC revoked his invitation, "it was profoundly disturbing to me that they still played 'Watani Ana' without my permission."

"Despite this, I then offered an olive branch to resolve the matter amicably by requesting an apology and a donation to the Societies of the Red Cross and the Red Crescent," Jandali said. "I did not ask for one penny for myself. ADC swiftly refused to issue an apology and instead offered me \$46.80 to go away. This is very offensive to me as an American citizen and an artist with rights."

Jandali stressed that he is not against the "noble mission" of ADC, "but I cannot accept a violation of my rights, especially by an anti-discrimination group and when certain board members hijack an entire organization to suit their special interest"

The ADC has a long history of claimed advocacy for Civil Rights both in the US and for Palestinians abroad. But the ADC has not made any advocacy efforts for the civil rights of Syrian Americans in the US or abroad. The conspicuous silence of the ADC on the torture, illegal detention and intimidation tactics used against Syrian Americans has called in to question the ADC's claim of advocacy of civil rights.

Director of Arab Americans for Democracy in Syria, Hamdi Rifal, said "The conduct of the ADC reflect it's inappropriate relationship with the Syrian regime and it's Ambassador to the US Imad Moustapha." Mr. Rifal continued on to say "Board member Safa Rifka can be seen on the Ambassador's own web blog in pictures showing their close relationship and two other Board Members, Assad Jebara and Jay Salkini recently traveled to Syria and met privately with President Bashar Assad."

Mr. Rifal has also noted that "the Ambassador's relationship with the ADC is most troubling because the ADC has been used as a tool to further suppress the free speech rights of Syrian Americans and create an atmosphere of fear and intimidation among Syrian Americans."

Subsequently, Malek Jandali's parents in Syria were assaulted, handcuffed and left for dead by the Syrian regime. Mr. Rifal explained that "Although it is suspected that the information of Mr. Jandali's support for the Syrian demand for freedom came from the Ambassador/embassies surveillance activities or as a result of information from the meeting with the ADC board members there is currently limited information available to demonstrate the link" but "the long arm of the Assad regime is a concern for many Syrian Americans."

The Ambassador and his staff have been summoned to the White House for their conduct and are travel restricted to a 25 mile radius of the embassy. An FBI investigation is currently pending.

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http://www.facebook.com/note.php?note_id=238847972810286

Politico coverage of issue

http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/0711/US_considering_travel_restrictions_against_Syrian_ambassador.html

CNN Coverage of expulsion of Ambassador

<http://www.wcti12.com/news/28620699/detail.html>

Washington Post coverage of issue

http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/national-security/fbi-interviews-syrian-activists-in-washington/2011/07/19/gIQAJ5BmOI_story.html

Wall Street Journal coverage of issue

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111904823804576504260399843094.html?mod=googlenews_wsj



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Fathi Zahzahan الله يعطيكم العافية هذا هو العمل السلمي والمؤثر نرجوا متابعة و التغطية الاعلامية نائبركم لا يقل أهمية عن المظاهرات بالداخل
August 17 at 12:37pm · Like · 1



Ruba Hashem Excellent work - Let the world know that we will no longer tolerate these practices of discrimination and disrespect. ADC should've known better than to play Jandali's recording without his consent.
August 18 at 5:23am · Like



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SATURDAY, JUNE 11, 2011

ADC backs down from censorship of Malik Jandali



Distributed by the www.ArabAmericanNewsWire.com

ADC to Open Tonight's Gala with "Watani Ana"

Washington, DC | www.adc.org | June 11, 2011 — ADC announced today that it will open its annual Gala with the playing of the song "Watani Ana" by Syrian composer and pianist Mr. Malek Jandali.

We regret the series of events that led to the cancellation of Mr. Jandali's performance.

We hope that by playing the song, with its powerful message of freedom, that we will address the valid concerns of many in the Arab-American community. It is in this spirit we hope to move forward and continue to build *our grassroots network*, as we work to empower Arab Americans.

ADC's mission as a civil rights organization will be advanced by being a broad umbrella that represents the whole community. We encourage the participation of all Arab Americans as a vital way of continuing to build, and improve our ability to defend our rights. It is regrettable that this issue has been emphasized by some to detract from the important work that ADC does and from its message conveyed at its

annual convention. ADC has gained its Arab-American community's trust by being active and fair and has worked diligently to protect their rights.

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