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## Arab Idol contestant dedicates voice to Syria, ranks sixth on YouTube



The performance of a Syrian contestant on one of the most-watched entertainment shows in the Middle East has generated political arguments and threats against him.

Abdel Kareem Hamdan, from Aleppo, made his first live appearance Saturday on Arab Idol, where he sang a heartfelt piece, written and composed by him, about the bloodshed in his hometown.

Following his performance, the audience and panel of judges stood up to show their respect and admiration.

“You’re an ambassador of peace and love... You’re your country’s ambassador,” pop star and judge Ragheb Alameh told Hamdan.

The performance was uploaded to YouTube, and received more than 2.3 million hits in less than three days, placing it on Wednesday as sixth on the website’s most-watched videos of the week.

However, sources who spoke to Al Arabiya, on the condition of anonymity for security reasons, said Hamdan’s performance was not appreciated by everyone. Subsequent threats were directed at the contestant, accusing him of supporting the Syrian opposition.

Pro-government groups exchanged posts on Facebook calling Hamdan a “traitor.”

In an interview with mbc.net, Hamdan said he is proud to be Syrian, and associates himself with all his compatriots, not any political or religious group.

“I sang for Syria, only Syria,” Hamdan said.

A Syrian journalist residing in Damascus told Al Arabiya that it was “devastating” to watch how people turned Hamdan’s “extraordinary talent” into something political.

“The man united our pain... We watched him with tears pouring out from our hearts,” the journalist said.