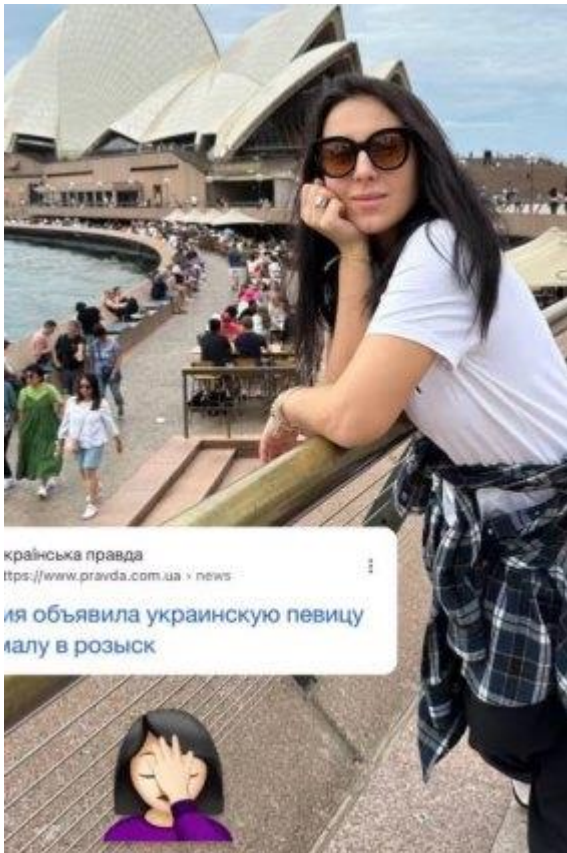


She once won Eurovision. Now in Sydney, she's wanted by Russia



By [Rob Harris](#), Sydney Morning Herald, November 22, 2023 — 7.30pm

London: Susana Jamaladinova was woken by her husband Bekir at their Kyiv home in the early hours of February 24 last year with two simple words: "It begins".



"Imagine waking up and seeing this on the world news," Jamala wrote on Instagram. *CREDIT: INSTAGRAM*

Despite weeks of warnings that Putin's army was on the move, the Eurovision-winning singer, known professionally as Jamala, still struggled to grasp the enormity of the event.

"It was first time in my life when I was just paralysed," she says. "You know, I feel it, I hear it, but I just couldn't do anything."

Part of the shock, she says, was the fact it was happening to her family again. Her great-grandmother was among 191,000 Tatars forcibly deported from Crimea in cattle trains to the city of Osh in Soviet Kyrgyzstan during World War II with her five children. Her baby daughter died on the way.

"Now everyone in Ukraine understands that this can happen to anyone again," she says.

That story inspired Jamala's biggest hit, *1944*, which won the 2016 Eurovision competition in Stockholm almost exactly two years after Russia annexed Crimea as political turmoil gripped Ukraine. It made her a national hero at home, but also put a target on her back.

On Monday, having arrived in Sydney to perform in Thursday's evening UNITED24 fundraising event to help rebuild Ukraine, she learnt she was now on the Kremlin's wanted list after the Ministry of Internal Affairs accused the 40-year-old of discrediting Moscow's army.

A law that bans the spreading of "fake information" about the Russian military and the ongoing fighting in Ukraine was adopted last year.

Russian news website *Mediazona* said Moscow added her name to the list in October. Earlier this month, she was arrested in absentia by a Russian court.



[Eurovision: Crimean Tatars, Ukrainians celebrate win, while Russia fumes](#)

Jamala reacted to the news by posting a picture of herself in front of the Sydney Opera House on Instagram with a facepalm emoji.

“At first I was like ‘You’re after me? Here I am in Sydney,’” she says. “Last week I was in Washington ... before that Paris and London... you can find all the information about me.

“But then of course you worry about your family, my two young boys, and my relatives. I don’t care much about myself because [performing] is my way of using my voice to help my country and tell the truth. It’s such a stressful thing for my family, for my parents, kids. I worry about them.”

The action is likely to have little more than symbolic impact for the singer, who still lives in Ukraine, where she has been a prominent advocate of the Tatar people, who are native to the Crimean Peninsula. Russia took over Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 after a popular uprising ousted a Russia-leaning president in the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv.

Ukraine has used Crimean Tatar heritage to counterbalance Russian cultural domination of the region, which became part of the Russian Empire after it was conquered in the 18th century. In 1954, the peninsula was transferred from Russian to Ukrainian authority within the Soviet Union.



Jamala’s 2016 win for Ukraine made her a high-profile target for Russian prosecutors. *CREDIT:AP*

The targeting of Jamala is likely part of a campaign by Moscow to silence activists who refuse to accept its rule of Crimea, and who oppose the war against Ukraine, both within Russia and beyond its borders. More than 30 Ukrainian artists have been banned from entering Russia as of April 2022.

Russia has also stepped up efforts to create its own popular music market, after being essentially shut out of the European one – including the Eurovision contest – after the February 2022 invasion.

Jamala, who will be supported at Sydney’s Fullerton Hotel by members of the well-known local soul band The Bluesberries, released a folk album earlier this year titled *Qirim* (“Crimea” in Crimean Tatar language).

She said Russian authorities may have already visited her relatives to “frighten” them.



Yuliia Paievska, known as Taira, on the frontline in Mariupol, Ukraine. She will be part of the Australian tour.*CREDIT:AP*

"[They're] trying to stop me or scare me ... but I strongly believe that as an artist, as a musician, as a songwriter, I can be real and live my life as I want."

Jamala was hand-picked by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to be part of a global charm offensive to remind the world of the nation's struggle and appeal for donations for children and school programs to continue.

She is joined on the tour by renowned Ukrainian combat medic Yuliia "Taira" Paievska, who helped raise the plight of the city of Mariupol with her bodycam footage beamed around the world, before she was captured by Russian forces, then released three months later in a prisoner exchange.

Jamala says over the past year she has worked with organisations and foundations that have raised around \$100 million to support Ukraine's defence and give aid to internally displaced people.

'We are fighting for our right to live in our home ... if Ukraine loses, the whole concept of democracy and freedom will lose.'

Susana Jamaladinova, Ukraine's 2016 Eurovision winner

She, like many at home, are conscious that places like Australia are far away from the war and have perhaps grown weary of world conflict.

"We are fighting for our right to live in our home. We didn't provoke this war," she says. "And if Ukraine loses, the whole concept of democracy and freedom will lose."

Her greatest weapon is her performances, she says, which have shown that "music can speak and convey the truth".

"And the truth is the truth. There is no getting away from it."

An Evening to Protect, Save and Rebuild Ukraine to raise funds for United24 is on Thursday, November 23 at The Fullerton Hotel, Sydney. Tickets: <https://futureukraine.org.au/events/>