

University occupations and Israel-related antisemitism – a commentary from the directors of remembrance sites dealing with the Nazi past in the Berlin area

Since 7 October 2023, and more acutely since the university occupations began in May 2024, we have become aware of positions taken within academia and would like to state our view from the perspective of our work at Holocaust memorial sites.

The current occupations of German universities in protest against the war in Gaza, a conflict that has had a devastating effect on the Palestinian civilian population, also provide a platform for radical anti-Zionist, anti-Israel and antisemitic voices, most recently in the occupation of the Institute of Social Sciences at Humboldt University Berlin on 22-23 May 2024. This was evident

- in the use of the red triangle, which Hamas uses to mark targets which it or other anti-Israel militants should attack;
- in the slogan 'From the river to the sea...', which targets Israel's right to exist;
- in the slogans 'Back to 1948' or 'We want 48', which demand a Palestine within the borders of the former British Mandate territory that existed before the UN partition plan and before the founding of the state of Israel;
- in calls such as 'Zionists are fascists, kill children and civilians', 'Zionism is a crime' or 'Anti-fascism is anti-Zionism', which create false historical analogies and revive old antisemitic stereotypes;
- in the statement 'Resistance is justified', which reframes the brutal terrorist attack by Hamas on 7 October 2023 as a legitimate military action;
- in the calls for violence against Israeli and Jewish institutions and individuals in Germany: 'From Berlin to Gaza, yallah intifada' or 'When Gaza burns Berlin burns.'

We see this language of violence and calls for a boycott of academic relations with Israel and Israelis as an attack on the principles of democratic debate and political-historical education. We work with Israeli institutions and people in Israel: with memorials, Holocaust survivors and their relatives; with universities and scholars; with museums and artists; with civil society organisations. And we will continue to cultivate and intensify academic and cultural relations with Israel.



**Ständige Konferenz
der NS-Gedenkorte
im Berliner Raum**

Haus der Wannsee-Konferenz
Gedenkstätte und Museum Sachsenhausen
Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas
Gedenkstätte Deutscher Widerstand
Topographie des Terrors

Universities and other educational institutions should be places of open, democratic debate. The protesters made the recognition of an alleged Israeli genocide a prerequisite for further talks with university leaders, for example on 22 May 2024 with the President of Humboldt University, Prof. Julia von Blumenthal. This clearly demonstrates an anti-Israel ideology that refuses to assess the present situation critically.

However, the statement that Berlin teaching faculty published on the occupations at the FU Berlin and other universities on 8 May 2024 was focused primarily on defending the rights of students to 'occupy university grounds.' There was no mention of their Jewish or Israeli students or other students who reject this view or who feel intimidated and threatened by the protests. Even with the planned clearing of the institute at Humboldt University on 23 May 2024, these instructors saw their role primarily as protecting students from possible police violence. What we found lacking were any words that contextualised, explained and critically commented on the statements, demands and aggressive, anti-democratic behaviour of so many protesters.

We take a critical view of the message being sent by how responsible parties are dealing with these highly aggressive 'protest camps.' It is not only Jewish or Israeli students who are being threatened. These protests target science and education as a whole and play a part in intimidating and excluding potential dialogue partners, which also prevents dialogue and understanding.

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