

The Board of the bbk berlin
31.10.2023

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About the situation

In the last two weeks, we have received numerous thoughts and messages of concern from our members. All are united by fear and horror about the escalations of violence in Israel and Palestine and their effects on Germany, Berlin, culture and politics. Extreme uncertainty exists.

The attack of Hamas and the killing of civilians cannot be justified by anything. Our full sympathy and mourning go out to the victims, we sincerely hope for the release of all hostages.

Due to its history of anti-Semitism and ethnic cleansing, Germany has a special responsibility towards Jewish life and Israel, this includes responsibility for the situation of the Palestinians.

Due to Israel's bombardment and blockade of Gaza, countless Palestinians have been killed in recent weeks, and the humanitarian situation is disastrous. We join the calls of [UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres](#), [Human Rights Watch](#), and [Amnesty International](#) for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire and compliance with international law.

We fear escalations such as the involvement of other warring parties leading to unimaginable consequences if the bombardment of Gaza continues, including the death of Israeli Hamas hostages.

Berlin is home to the largest Palestinian diaspora in Europe as well as one of the largest Israeli diasporas in the world. In recent years, there has been a sharp increase in [racist](#) and [anti-Semitic](#) discrimination and violence in Germany – not just since October 7.

We do not want to allow the grief and suffering of those directly and indirectly affected, including our friends, colleagues, and neighbours to be played off against each other. We speak out against reductive, absolutist equations of militias or governments of countries with the people in and from these countries. Even a national flag is not congruent with an ethnic or religious affiliation. Such equations create polarization and division – from which only the right-wing and far-right agendas benefit.

We are witnessing that, in the current situation, freedom of art, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, the press code, and asylum law are being questioned and authoritatively restricted in Berlin and across Germany. This creates a critical loss of trust in society and the state. We live in Berlin because we value the city as a place of great freedom, solidarity and polyphony: In Berlin, public mourning and protest must be possible. We agree with the assessment and the demands of the [Open letter of Jewish intellectuals](#) published on 22.10.2023.

Artists must not be silenced through hasty self-censorship by institutions. Taking away the space for Israeli, Palestinian, Muslim and Jewish voices to speak at this exact moment is not only an ethical failure but a loss for empathetic and nuanced public debate and informed opinion-making.

Cultural practitioners should have the right to express themselves freely. Powerful organizations, such as the German Cultural Council, as well as leading media, should not exert pressure to take a public stand on the situation in the Middle East. We, as artists of Berlin, are a diverse community – the majority of whom are not experts in the area of conflicts in the Middle East – in which everyone should feel that he/she is granted the space to feel safe as an equal. Many do not speak out for fear of saying the wrong thing, for fear that they will not find the right words, that their statements will unintentionally hurt, be misunderstood or instrumentalized. Whatever happens. We urgently appeal to the media to live up to their role as the fourth estate in democracy, to apply due diligence and the press code, and not to incite hatred.

As artists in Berlin, we call together for the following: Show cohesion! Stand up against anti-Semitism and racism in the everyday and the structural.

In addition to the people directly affected, fearing for family and friends or have lost friends and family: All those affected by racism and anti-Semitism need our solidarity and support.

We, therefore, demand the protection of discourse spaces to apply media literacy, question binary ways of thinking and to engage in mutual exchange.

Let's be there for each other and reach out to those affected. Let's inquire, listen, and support wherever we can. No one should have to go through this time alone. Let us stand together.

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