

Accusation of anti-Semitism against the Berlinale

Open letter to Claudia Roth

German Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media

by Shelly Steinberg, Germany

(Edit.) At this year's Berlinale, an international film festival, the documentary film "No Other Land" was honoured with the Berlinale Documentary Film Award. The film deals with the expulsion of Palestinians in the West Bank. In his acceptance speech, the Palestinian co-director, Basel Adra, said: "It is very difficult for me to celebrate when tens of thousands of my people in Gaza are being slaughtered by Israel." He demanded that Germany should not supply any more weapons to Israel. Israeli co-director Yuval Abraham spoke of "apartheid" in the West Bank. The audience applauded. Minister of State for Culture Claudia Roth (Greens) then raised the accusation of "disgusting open anti-Semitism". In her letter to Mrs Roth, Shelly Steinberg rejects this accusation and characterises it.

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Dear Mrs Roth,

I am writing to you because I am speechless and stunned by the reactions to the speeches at the Berlinale 2024.

I was born in Israel and grew up in Germany. I studied Jewish Studies, Jewish History and Culture as well as Cultural Sociology at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich.

In 2010, I completed an internship in the Knesset in Jerusalem as part of the IPS (*International Parliamentary Scholarship*) for the Bundestag.

For years, an extremely alarming, repressive political approach to voices critical of Israel has been evident here in Germany.

To push through a pro-Israeli agenda, politicians and other public institutions misuse the term anti-Semitism. This defamation does not stop at Jewish or Israeli critics. It can be observed how German politicians turn themselves into henchmen of the Israel lobby and disregard the law in the process. Freedom of opinion is one of the highest democratic values – but as soon as it comes to Israel, German politicians throw constitutional principles overboard. People are deprived of their constitutional right to freedom



Shelly Steinberg speaking at the Stachus in Munich on 17.2.24. (Picture <https://sicherheitskonferenz.de>)

of expression in favour of Israel's policies. However, freedom of opinion does not only mean the right of the individual to freely express an opinion, but also the right to form an opinion freely; with the permanent censorship, the state is thus disregarding the right of society to have access to different information. And it would be the task on the political level to precisely guarantee this spectrum of information and not – as it does now – to impose a certain opinion and directive and enforce it with unconstitutional repression.

Anti-Semitism is clearly defined as hatred/enmity towards Jews because of their mere existence as Jews. With anti-Semitism, as with any form of racism, it is not about *what* is done, but by *whom* something is done – it is not the what, but the who that is decisive here. And that is why the accusation of anti-Semitism against critics of Israeli policy is absurd.

The Palestinians and their supporters don't care about the fact that the occupiers and oppressors are Jews – if the occupiers were Buddhists, the Palestinians would fight back in the same way. It is rather the Germans who obsessively defend everything Israel does because they are Jews. It is the Germans for whom the who plays the decisive role – and that clearly corresponds to the definition of anti-Semitism.

The word "Jew" was not mentioned once at the Berlinale. Nevertheless, anti-Semitism is being fantasised here. If you are not allowed to use the term "genocide" in relation to Israel's actions in Gaza because it is anti-Semitic, then the reverse implies that genocide is something Jewish. The image of Jewishness being painted here by German politicians is sheer impudence. There is nothing Jewish about disenfranchising, degrading, and killing children, men, and women. There is nothing Jewish about stealing the land of another people and oppressing and exploiting the local population. Therefore, criticising such conditions *cannot* be anti-Semitic. However, anyone who speaks of anti-Semitism in the face of these crimes is misusing the term and painting a disgusting

picture of Judaism. I vehemently oppose such a portrayal of Judaism!

Instead of fighting true anti-Semitism within our own ranks, we are attacking anyone who criticises Israel. Such behaviour is not particularly conducive to the democratic order in this country.

It would be nice if Jewish voices other than those of the *Central Council* of Jews were heard for once – because the Central Council only represents the absolute minority of Jews living in Germany. The Central Council is not a political body elected by the citizens, which is why there is a lack of understanding among citizens about the enormous influence of the Central Council on certain political issues. It is not the task of German politicians to allow themselves to be dictated to by the Central Council in matters relating to Israel and then to implement them uncritically.

I am available for further dialogue at any time.

With kind regards

*Shelly Steinberg, Jewish-Palestinian
dialogue group Munich*

Source: <https://diefreiheitsliebe.de/kultur/berlinale-brief-von-shelly-steinberg-an-claudia-roth/>, 28 February 2024
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