

The following is a TRANSLATION, which is intended to make the statement more accessible. The German version is valid.

Trigger warning: This statement contains descriptions of anti-Semitic acts, police violence, and terrorist attacks.

On 22.05.2024, pro-Palestinian activists of the “Student Coalition Berlin” occupied our Institute for Social Sciences for 30 hours. As promised, we would like to express our position on the matter in this statement.

We, the student council, were not informed in advance about the occupation, nor were we involved in it. We were solely present as observers.

The demands of the occupation can be read here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DvkcmPCJQNiHtwNfbOkgLkZ0nOQLgc25Mxy9mMpDfAw/>

As the student council, we consider (student) occupations to be, in principle, a legitimate form of protest. Very different opinions on the Middle East conflict are represented within the student council, which is why we have to endure contradictions in order to be a point of contact for all SoWi students. This statement will therefore explicitly not reflect the exact position of every single person in the student council or student body, and is a product of an intensive and painful examination of the topic. This statement does not claim to depict the conflict in all its complexity, as that would be impossible.

Students are affected by this conflict, which has been going on for decades, in many ways.

We as a student council recognize that the Hamas attack on October 7, 2023 was cruel and cannot be justified by anything. A large number of innocent people in Israel were killed by the anti-Jewish¹ terrorist organization Hamas, others were taken hostage and tortured. Many of them have still not been freed.

We as a student council equally recognize that the murder and violent displacement of Palestinian civilians is intolerable. The Israeli army and the far-right Israeli government have clearly gone far beyond a mere act of self-defense against Hamas, especially since October 7, attacking hospitals, universities and, above all, civilians. The International Court of Justice has determined that Israel's “acts and omissions [...] in Gaza appear to be capable of falling within the provisions of the [Genocide] Convention”².

HU students and their families are also directly affected by all of this. We as a student council support a ceasefire. We consider the end of the war in Palestine to be an important demand.

We do not use the term anti-Semitism in the following as a simple knock-down argument against pro-Palestinian activism, as has unfortunately happened time and again in recent months. We reject the instrumentalization of anti-Semitism for anti-Muslim and racist purposes, as is regularly attempted by right-wing actors. We do not consider solidarity with Palestine to be anti-Semitic per se.

¹ In the German version of this statement, we use the term „Juden_Jüdinnen“, referring to the leftist, Jewish, queer-feminist group Latkes*Berlin: <https://latkesberlin.wordpress.com/2020/10/24/juden-gendern/>

² The New York Times 2024

During the occupation, the occupiers engaged in unmistakable anti-Semitic incitement. For example, inverted red triangles were often sprayed around the institute. The inverted red triangle is used by Hamas to mark and ultimately murder its mostly Jewish enemies.³ “al-Qassam” graffiti with hearts was also sprayed. The Qassam Brigades is a paramilitary branch of Hamas that killed over 1,400 people and kidnapped over 200 on October 7, 2023.⁴ In addition, direct comparisons between the university management and Hitler were drawn at the occupation and the Shoah was relativized. In particular, we show solidarity with individual people who were threatened by the occupation.

These are just a few of many examples. All of this is undoubtedly anti-Semitic and despicable. The defense that it is about Israel and not Jews does not change this. We see that Jewish people are also campaigning for Palestine worldwide and that anti-Semitic hatred was not the main aim of the occupation. At the same time, Jews have been pointing out anti-Semitic content within the pro-Palestinian movement for many months. Their legitimate fears were once again not taken seriously during the occupation.

None of this should ever have happened and must never happen again. The anti-Semitic hatred spread by the occupiers is intolerable and cannot be justified by anything. The fact that Humboldt University, more than 70 years after the end of the Shoah, of which it was itself a setting, has become once again a place of fear for Jewish people, who are not responsible for the actions of the Israeli military, is inconceivable and appalling. We would like to see a comprehensive reflection on anti-Semitism within the Student Coalition Berlin and the assumption of responsibility for the anti-Semitic incitement that was spread during the occupation.

It must be stated unequivocally: There is no place for anti-Semitism at the Institute for Social Sciences. A commitment to Palestine and a consistent stance against anti-Semitism are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, they must be brought together.

We welcome the fact that the university management initially sought dialog with the occupiers and tried to avoid repressive measures. We are all the more appalled by the actions of the Senate and in particular the Governing Mayor Kai Wegner. The Senate ordered the immediate eviction of the occupation by the police, against the wishes of the university's chairwoman to postpone the eviction, while a possible resumption of the dialog between the university and the occupiers was still on the table.

The Senate is therefore responsible for the violent escalation of the conflict and not only prevented the dialog, but also violated the academic independence of the university, a fundamental principle of democratic societies. With this decision, students and staff were put at risk – some were there as part of the occupation, some as part of the round of discussion and some as observers; all were put at risk against the specific wishes of the university management. Specific arrangements, such as allowing everyone who left the institute peacefully to go without having their personal details taken, were broken.

We have received reports that some of those present were subjected to sexualized violence, racial profiling and life-threatening injuries by the police. Muslim people were targeted, regardless of whether they were participating in the occupation. Nothing can justify the

³ Greve 2024

⁴ Al Jazeera 2023

violent and racist actions of the police. Regardless of what happened during the occupation, police violence is NEVER justifiable.

The governing mayor Kai Wegner continues his aggressive and racist “law and order” policy mercilessly and thus endangers students. The only justified demands for a resignation can therefore be made to Kai Wegner.

The dialog between students and university management must continue even after the eviction. To this end, safe spaces must be created, especially for Jewish and Palestinian students, where they can voice their concerns free from censorship, but also free from anti-Semitism and anti-Palestinian racism. In addition, a counseling and support service, beyond the anti-Semitism officer and psychological counseling, is needed. We hope that Prof. von Blumenthal and the entire Executive Board will initiate such measures.

We would like to emphasize positively and gratefully that several professors and academic staff stayed in the building when the police started the eviction to protect students from violence. This requires a great deal of civil courage and we greatly appreciate it.

In public discourse, right-wing actors in particular are calling for a “crackdown” at the university under the guise of security. We must clearly oppose this. It was precisely this “crackdown” by the Senate and the police that endangered the safety of students.

Student rights have come under particular attack in recent years, including through the currently debated amendment to university law. We must clearly oppose this as well.

We, the student council, are taking this occupation as an opportunity for a detailed internal reflection process – whereby “internal” naturally includes all Social Sciences students at HU, who are cordially invited to take part in this process. Clearly, we have failed to make the student council a safe and welcoming space for Palestinian and Jewish students and for students affected by displacement and war, and we have failed to stand up for their interests. This is not okay and we will develop a concept on how we can be more solidary in the future. We are very open to and grateful for feedback and requests

Palestinian, Jewish and students affected by police violence should always be welcome and receive support from us. Our aim is to be there for all students despite contradictions, and we have to make an effort to achieve this. For us, this is one of the most important conclusions that we draw from the occupation.

References

Al Jazeera (2023): What is Hamas's armed wing, the Qassam Brigades? Available online at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/10/26/who-are-qassam-armed-resistance-in-gaza>, last checked on 29.05.2024.

Greve, Luise (2024): Pro-Palestine movement in Berlin. Differences in triangular interpretation. Available online at <https://taz.de/Pro-Palaestina-Bewegung-in-Berlin/!6012578/>, last checked on 29.05.2024.

Latkes*berlin (2020): Gendering Jews. Available online at <https://latkesberlin.wordpress.com/2020/10/24/juden-gendern/>, last checked on 29.05.2024.

The New York Times (2024): Read the I.C.J. ruling. Available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2024/01/26/world/middleeast/icj-gaza-provisional-ruling.html>, last checked on 29.05.2024.