

To be clear from the start: the comments made by Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas when addressing the Fatah Regional Council about Jews and the Holocaust are unconscionable. The Holocaust happened because of nothing else but antisemitism and racism. These remarks follow a similar sentiment expressed last year by President Abbas during a press conference with Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Berlin, when he claimed that Israel had carried out "50 holocausts" against the Palestinians. Abbas was condemned, including by Chancellor Scholz, and retracted his comments. Now this time round, President Abbas has been rightly condemned by the German Representative Office in Ramallah, which stated that
".“millions of lives were erased- this cannot be relativized

One has to admit: we, as members of the Palestinian people, have a deep problem internalizing the horror of the Holocaust. It is difficult for victims to acknowledge their oppressors' pain. Thus generations of Palestinians who experienced the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948, the flight and expulsion of Palestinians from the territory of today's Israel, ongoing displacement and the seemingly unending occupation imposed since 1967, are disinclined to seek knowledge about or have empathy with the terrible suffering of the parents and grandparents of our present-day oppressors

And yet, this psychological-sociological explanation, as valid as it may be, does not license us to remain mired in inexcusable ignorance. I believe that it is our duty to
.teach our society about the horrors of the Holocaust

When I address a Palestinian audience, this is where I stop. But here I am addressing a German audience, thus a few more words are necessary. It is clear that Germany bears direct historic responsibility for the Holocaust, and continues to grapple with its history; it is also clear that there are universal duties imposed upon us all by the Holocaust. We must stand up for a global rule-based order which is based on the principles of international law which emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust. In the wake of the twentieth century's legacy, it is incumbent upon us all, of course including us Palestinians, to protect democracy and human rights, and to
.join the fight against antisemitism and racism of all kinds

These same duties should compel Germans to face the reality in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: we are living under an apartheid regime. The city center of Hebron – my native city, where I have lived my entire life – has been turned into a segregated ghost town. According to the Israeli human right organization B'Tselem, over 1000 families have been displaced in downtown Hebron in the past 25 years, and 1500 businesses have been shut down, dooming many of the city's residents to a life of poverty, in order to allow the presence of 850 settlers from the occupying power, contravening international law.¹ I and fellow Palestinians are prohibited from even walking some of Hebron's main streets which are referred to as "sterile" by the Israeli military authorities. Hebron is a microcosm of the two-tier legal system which is enforced in the entire West Bank. While Israeli settlers enjoy the full protection of civilian law, we as stateless Palestinians are subjected to the jurisdiction of the military courts with close to 100 percent conviction rate year on year. These are courts that convicted me for my non-violent activism against the occupation in Hebron. When the judge sentenced me for 3 months imprisonment and 2 years' probation, it was because I was a repeat offender who, as the judge put it, continued to take part in protests which did not have a license. In a military occupation regime

https://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/publications/201909_playing_the_security_card_eng.pdf, page. 22

that prohibits the gathering of 10 or more people for a political purpose or for a matter that might be construed as political, attending non-violent protests apparently makes you a criminal.² Why would you not call this apartheid? This is our daily reality. Yet show me one German politician who acknowledges it. Germany leaves its commitment to human rights at the door of the occupied territories. Indeed, when former German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas publicly doubted the legitimacy of the International Criminal Court's investigation on Palestine - arguing that Palestine lacked the necessary statehood – Germany encouraged human rights violations to multiply.³ Most recently, it was reported that the German chancellery blocked the German Foreign Ministry's written statement to the International Court of Justice's Advisory Opinion regarding the illegality of Israel's occupation, on the grounds that⁴ the statement went too far in its criticism of Israeli policies in the occupied territories

Also recently, the German Commissioner for the Fight Against Antisemitism Dr. Felix Klein claimed that using the framework of apartheid to describe Israel's treatment of Palestinians is antisemitic.⁵ The fight against antisemitism is essential for our humanity. But this fight must not be misused by labelling genuine criticism of Israeli apartheid policies as antisemitic. Any Government who does this issues Israel a .blank cheque to pursue its oppression of my people with impunity

The shortcoming of Germany's commitment to human rights does not stop at its treatment of Israel but is evident in its attitude to Abbas. For the sake of the stability and security of Israel and its illegal settlers, Germany continues to perpetuate the .status quo, and turns a blind eye to the authoritarian behaviour of the PA

For how long will Germany continue to fund an authority under which journalists too often end up arrested for the "crime" of speaking out? Freedom of expression is not a value which the PA under the leadership of Mahmoud Abbas shares with its European benefactors. I myself have been detained by the PA for my activism - similarly to when the Israeli authorities detained me. And many of my fellow human rights defenders have suffered worse. The activist and my friend Nizar Banat was .killed for his honesty in PA custody in 2021

When Abbas was at the Fatah Revolutionary Council and said his remarks, he did so as a leader who had overstayed his electoral term by 14 years. Given that approximately two-thirds of the Palestinian population in the occupied territories are under 30 years old, and that the last elections were more than fifteen years ago, about half of today's electorate have never had an opportunity to vote at all due to .Abbas' authoritarian habit of evading or canceling elections

I risk being interrogated and jailed by Abbas' security apparatus (again) for writing this. Nevertheless, I have summoned the courage and will necessary to embrace the lessons of the Holocaust, stand against oppression and hypocrisy, and speak out in favor of democracy and human rights for all. Allow me to call on you, citizens of a .free country, to do the same

https://www.btselem.org/publications/201007_right_to_demonstrate²

<https://twitter.com/heikomaas/status/1359215215913623564?lang=en>³

<https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2023-08-23/ty-article-magazine/.premium/insanely-complex-germany-israels-arrow-3-system-and-the-occupation/0000018a-224d-da97-a7cb-66ffd86a0000>⁴

<https://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/2023-08-07/ty-article/.premium/german-czar-says-calling-israel-apartheid-is-antisemitic/00000189-d04d-d821-afdd-db6d0c260000>⁵

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