

Mr. Felix Klein

Federal government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and
the Fight against Antisemitism
Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community
Alt-Moabit 140
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Germany

Copied: Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany
Horst Seehofer, Federal Minister of the Interior
Franziska Giffey, Federal Minister for Family Affairs
Heiko Maas, Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs

Concerns: your statement regarding “antisemitism from the left-liberal milieu”

10 July 2020

Dear Mr. Klein,

We are Jewish scholars and artists from Israel and elsewhere, many of whom specialize in anti-Semitism and in Jewish, Holocaust and Israel Studies. On April 30, we [wrote](#) to German Interior Minister Horst Seehofer and called for your replacement as the Federal government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism. We did so following your shameful attack on Prof. Achille Mbembe, one of the most important intellectuals in Africa and globally.

A statement has now been brought to our attention, which you made on June 30. In the presence of Franziska Giffey, the German Minister for Family Affairs, you said: “We all know, perhaps, ladies and gentlemen, that it is precisely the antisemitism from the left-liberal milieu that has made life, also for me personally, quite a bit harder in the last few weeks. But even if right-wing narratives currently have a higher potential for violence, we must not underestimate this area.”

We strongly object. No “left-liberal anti-Semites” are bullying you, but Jews and non-Jews who are protesting the way in which you are weaponizing the fight against antisemitism, at the expense of free speech and basic civil rights – and the fight against antisemitism itself. Holding you accountable for statements and actions in your official capacity, Mr. Klein, is not antisemitism. It’s the essence of democracy.

Your statement quoted above is deeply offensive. You basically called us and many others criticising you in a legitimate way anti-Semites. We demand an apology for that. It also testifies to your distorted understanding of the acute danger that Jews in Germany face due to the surge in far-right antisemitism. Without hesitation, you compare “left-liberal” critiques to right-wing violence and insist that the former not be underestimated.

While you do so, we observe a method you have been using before: stigmatizing and incriminating critics through undefined and unsubstantiated allegations. Instead of supporting your charges with concrete and credible information relating to the intent and behaviour of specific individuals, you make do with generalizations such as “anti-Semitism from the left-liberal milieu”. Aside from us feeling implicated: who are you pointing at? On what grounds?

We consider such a reliance on vague but highly toxic insinuations problematic and detrimental in itself, but even more so when used and amplified by a senior official appointed by the German government to fight antisemitism.

In a recent [article](#) in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Journalist and Jurist Stephan Detjen wrote: “Restrictions of freedom of opinion, when motivated by allegations of proximity to BDS, require a clear legal basis and are subject to an examination scheme developed by the Federal Constitutional Court.”

You have been a driving force behind attempts to undermine free speech by categorically defining and disqualifying the BDS Movement, which has a minuscule footprint in Germany, as antisemitic. However, in its [judgement](#) on June 11, the European Court of Human Rights confirmed and clarified that activism in the context of BDS is protected by freedom of expression.

As we have stressed before, our views about BDS differ. But all of us were hoping this ruling would motivate you to shift your attention to the real dangers posed by antisemitism in Germany. As we were hoping the extensive criticism directed at you following your attack on Prof. Mbembe would induce you to stop launching baseless and undefined accusations. However, your latest statement about “anti-Semitism from the left-liberal milieu” made clear our hope was unfounded.

You display a lack of awareness and respect for democratic values. You fail to distinguish between legitimate criticism and real antisemitism. As the Israeli government is moving towards formal annexation of parts of the West Bank and the need for loud international criticism and opposition is only growing, you keep chilling the public and political debate in Germany and beyond.

In his aforementioned article, Stephan Detjen emphasizes that the Federal government Commissioner for Jewish Life in Germany and the Fight against Antisemitism carries “a sharp sword” – for good reasons. Yet again, you have demonstrated you do not know how to use this sword.

We are calling on you to resign.

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Dr. Seth Anziska, Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies, University College London

Prof. Louise Bethlehem, Department of English and the Program in Cultural Studies, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; recipient European Research Council Consolidators Grant

Prof. Daniel Boyarin, Taubman Professor of Talmudic Culture, University of California, Berkeley; Fellow American Academy of Arts and Sciences; Von Humboldt Senior Laureate

Prof. (emerita) Jane Caplan, Professor of Modern European History, University of Oxford; Emeritus Fellow, St Antony’s College, Oxford

Dr. Raya Cohen, formerly Department of Jewish History, Tel Aviv University; formerly Department of Sociology, University of Naples Federico II

Prof. Jean Comaroff, Alfred North Whitehead Professor of African and African American Studies and of Anthropology; Oppenheimer Research Fellow in African Studies, Harvard University

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Prof. Neve Gordon, School of Law, Marie Curie Fellow, Queen Mary University of London

Dr. Ilana Hammerman, Writer, recipient of the Yeshayahu Leibowitz Prize

Prof. David Harel, Department of Computer Science and Applied Mathematics, The Weizmann Institute of Science; recipient of the Israel Prize and of the EMET Prize

Dani Karavan, Sculptor, projects include the Memorial to the Sinti and Roma victims of National Socialism in Berlin, the Regensburg Synagogue Memorial and the Way of Human Rights in Nuremberg; recipient of the Israel Prize

Miki Kratsman, Photographer; former head of the Photography Department at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design; recipient of the EMET Prize

Alex Levac, Photographer, recipient of the Israel Prize

Prof. (emeritus) Yehuda Judd Ne'eman, Tel Aviv University, recipient of the Israel Prize

Dr. (emeritus) Mark Levene, Department of History, University of Southampton UK; Parkes Centre for Jewish/non-Jewish Relations; recipient of the Lemkin Prize of the Institute for the Study of Genocide

Prof. Neil Levi, English Department (chair), Drew University

Dr. Anat Matar, Department of Philosophy, Tel Aviv University

Prof. (emeritus) Paul Mendes-Flohr, Dorothy Grant Maclear Professor Emeritus of Modern Jewish History and Thought and Associate Faculty in the Department of History, The University of Chicago Divinity School; Professor Emeritus of Jewish Thought, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

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