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زبانهای اروپایی

By Vijay Prashad and Katie Halper
13.03.2023

Frankfurt City Council Undermines Human Rights by Canceling a Concert by Roger Waters

After a highly acclaimed run in North America, Roger Waters will take his “This Is Not a Drill” [tour](#) across Europe. The long journey includes shows in Germany, with the final concert in the country originally planned to take place in Frankfurt on May 28. On February 24, however, Frankfurt’s city council and the Hessian state government [announced](#) the cancellation of the Frankfurt concert, for “persistent anti-Israel behavior,” and called Waters an antisemite.

The cancellation of Waters’s concert is a threat to free speech and artistic freedom. It is designed to silence legitimate criticism of Israel’s government emanating from the world human rights community and within Israel itself. Waters’s music has captivated the world for more than five decades. Over that time, he has also become a respected human rights advocate. In response to the decision by Frankfurt’s city council, artists and human rights leaders, including Peter Gabriel, Julie Christie, Noam Chomsky, Susan Sarandon, Alia Shawkat, and Glenn Greenwald, have signed a [petition calling on the German government](#) to uncancel the concert.

In a more civilized world, Frankfurt would be giving him an award for his courage, not trying to silence him with state censorship.

To be clear, the position of Waters regarding the disparate treatment by the Israeli government of Jews and Palestinians—with numerous legal policies and laws that favor Jews over Palestinians—is well within the mainstream of the international human rights community.

A range of prominent human rights groups, including [Human Rights Watch](#) and [Amnesty](#)

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[International](#), as well as United Nations agencies and experts such as the [UN special rapporteur](#), argue that Israel's policy has created an "apartheid" state within Israel through its occupation of the Palestinian territories. Indeed, in 2021, the respected Israeli human rights group B'Tselem issued a strong [statement](#) calling the Israeli government "a regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea" and concluding, "This is apartheid." The statements Waters has made about Israel are entirely in line with these criticisms from these respected organizations and institutions.

The conflation of criticism of Israel and antisemitism is dangerous and perpetuates the common antisemitic perspective that all Jews monolithically support Israel. Because antisemitism is a real issue, its weaponization and distortion to stifle legitimate criticism of Israel is reckless, and undermines the fight against antisemitism.

The Frankfurt City Council's statement offered no evidence for its claim except that Waters [has](#) "repeatedly called for a cultural boycott of Israel and drew comparisons to the apartheid regime in South Africa." The statement about the "cultural boycott of Israel" is a reference to [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions](#) (BDS), the Palestinian-led movement launched in 2005 that has since gained significant support across the globe.

We reached out to Waters for his response to the campaign against him, and he told us: "My platform is simple: it is implementation of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights for all our brothers and sisters in the world including those between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. My support of universal human rights is universal. It is not antisemitism, which is odious and racist and which, like all forms of racism, I condemn unreservedly."

The official equation of criticism of Israeli policy with antisemitism is problematic, but it is not new in contemporary Germany. In May 2019, the German Parliament passed a nonbinding [resolution](#) that associated BDS with antisemitism. This resolution followed a series of attacks on organizations, including numerous Jewish groups (such as the Germany-based group [Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East](#)) whose advocacy on behalf of Palestinians was, at the same moment, being classified by the Israeli government as antisemitic.

In response to this targeting of critics of Israel's government over its mistreatment of Palestinians, more than 90 Jewish scholars and intellectuals signed an open [letter](#) in defense of Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East. The last line of that letter called upon "the members of German civil society to fight antisemitism relentlessly while maintaining a clear distinction between criticism of the state of Israel, harsh as it may be,

and antisemitism, and to preserve free speech for those who reject Israeli repression against the Palestinian people and insist that it comes to an end.”

In its attack on Waters, the Frankfurt City Council mimicked the current thinking followed by the extremist Israeli government in its weaponization of antisemitism to try to undermine critics of its official narrative.

The attack on Waters by the Frankfurt City Council is part of a disturbing pattern in contemporary Germany. The Berlin-based Jewish photographer Adam Broomberg, who is well-known for his work on the cruelty and irrationality of violence, found himself being [targeted](#) by the city of Hamburg’s antisemitism commissioner, Stefan Hensel.

Hensel has used his [social media](#) and various [newspapers](#) to attack anyone who supports the BDS movement as being “antisemitic.” His campaign against Broomberg raised the ire of the photographer, who was born in South Africa and who has an intimate and very personal understanding of apartheid. Broomberg [told](#) the art magazine Hyperallergic that he was confounded by this attack: “For a commissioner of antisemitism, for his first and most vehement and powerful attack to be on a Jew and to put a Jew’s life and profession at risk, is totally ironic. ... I just buried my mother who knew the Holocaust and I come back and I’m accused of being a hateful antisemite advocating for terrorism against Jews. I couldn’t be more Jewish,” he said. “It’s affected me profoundly.”

In early March 2023, Hensel [posted](#) a photograph of Roger Waters on Instagram in the film version of his 2010-2013 concert tour “The Wall.” Alongside the picture, Hensel wrote: “The motto should be: ‘Roger Waters is not welcome in Hamburg.’” Adam Broomberg [responded](#) on Twitter that Hensel’s image of Waters appearing in character as a fascist villain was taken out of context from an “undeniably anti-war film by Waters and [Sean] Evans called ‘The Wall’ to depict him as a Nazi in an attempt to cancel his concert.”

This distortion, Broomberg [wrote](#), is an example of “German propaganda.”

In July 2022, South Africa’s Foreign Minister [Naledi Pandor](#) while addressing a meeting of the Palestinian Heads of Mission in Africa said that “The Palestinian narrative evokes experiences of South Africa’s own history of racial segregation and oppression.” Reflecting on the findings of human rights reports and UN documents, Pandor said: “These reports are significant in raising global awareness of the conditions that Palestinians are subjected to, and they provide credence and support to an overwhelming body of factual evidence, all pointing to the fact that the State of Israel is committing crimes of apartheid and persecution against Palestinians.”

Nothing that prominent international artists like Waters or Broomberg have said would be alien to the content of these reports or different from what Naledi Pandor said at that meeting in Pretoria. Indeed, everything she said mirrors the [library](#) of UN resolutions demonstrating the illegality of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and the apartheid conditions being faced by Palestinians inside Israel and its territories. The attack by the Frankfurt City Council on Waters is not actually an effort to call out antisemitism; it is, rather, an attack on the human rights of Palestinians.

Author Bio: *This article was produced by [Globetrotter](#).*

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Source: Globetrotter

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