

Vice Chancellor and Federal Minister Robert Habeck
Speech on Israel and anti-Semitism
01.11.2023

Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel took place almost four weeks ago now. A lot has happened since then. Not only politically, but especially for the people. So many people's lives are now consumed by fear and suffering.

Public debate since the attack has been heated, sometimes muddled.

I want to use this video to help make things clearer. Too much seems to me to have been mixed up too quickly.

The phrase, "Israel's security is part of Germany's *raison d'état*" has never been an empty phrase, and it must not become one. It means that Israel's security is essential for us as a country.

This special relationship with Israel stems from our historical responsibility. It was the generation of my grandparents that wanted to exterminate Jewish life in Germany and Europe.

After the Holocaust, the founding of Israel was the promise of protection to the Jews – and Germany is compelled to help ensure that this promise can be fulfilled. This is a historical foundation of our republic.

Our historical responsibility also means that Jews must be able to live freely and safely in Germany. That they never again have to be afraid to openly show their religion and their culture. But it is precisely this fear that is back.

I recently met with members of the Jewish community in Frankfurt. In the intense, painful talk we had, the community representatives told me that their children are afraid to go to school, that they no longer go to sports clubs, that they leave their necklaces with the Star of David at home on the advice of their parents.

Today, here in Germany. Almost 80 years after the Holocaust.

They told us that they no longer dare to get into a taxi, that they no longer put return addresses on letters to protect their recipients.

Today, here in Germany. Almost 80 years after the Holocaust.

And a Jewish friend told me about his fear, his sheer despair, his feeling of loneliness. The Jewish communities warn their members to avoid certain places – for their own safety.

And this is the reality here today, in Germany, almost 80 years after the Holocaust.

Anti-Semitism is being seen at demonstrations, in statements, in attacks on Jewish shops, in threats.

While large waves of solidarity are shown when there are racist attacks for example, solidarity quickly becomes fragile when it comes to Israel. People say that the context is complex. But contextualisation must not lead to relativization.

It is true, that in our debate culture, there is often too much shock and outrage. But here, we cannot be outraged enough. What is needed now is clarity, not a blur.

And to be clear: anti-Semitism is not to be tolerated in any form – whatsoever.

The scale of the Islamist demonstrations in Berlin and other cities in Germany is unacceptable and needs a tough political response. This is also needed from the Muslim associations. Some have clearly distanced themselves from the actions of Hamas and from anti-Semitism, and have sought dialogue. But not all of them – some have been too hesitant to do so, and it's been too few overall.

Muslims living here are entitled to protection from right-wing extremist violence – and rightly so. When they are attacked, their right to protection must be honoured and they must also honour this right of the Jews now that the Jews have been attacked. They must clearly distance themselves from anti-Semitism so as not to undermine their own right to tolerance. There is no place for religious intolerance in Germany.

Whoever lives here does so according to the rules of this country. And whoever comes here must know that this is how it is and that this will be enforced.

Our constitution provides protection and bestows rights, but it also imposes obligations that must be fulfilled by all. You cannot separate the two. Tolerance cannot tolerate intolerance here. This is the core of our coexistence in the Federal Republic of Germany.

This means that burning Israeli flags is a criminal offence, as is praising Hamas terror. Any German citizen who does this will have to answer for such offences in court; those who are not German citizens will also risk their residency status. Anyone who does not yet have a residence permit will have provided a reason to be deported.

Islamist anti-Semitism, however, should not blind us to the fact that we also have entrenched anti-Semitism in Germany. The only difference is that the right-wing extremists are currently holding back, for purely tactical reasons, in order to be able to agitate against Muslims. Relativising the Second World War, the Nazi regime as a “minor incident” is not only relativising the Holocaust, it is a slap in the face of the victims and survivors. Everyone who listens should know this and needs to understand. The Second World War was a war of extermination against Jews; for the Nazi regime, the annihilation of European Jewry was always the main goal.

And because there are many Putin admirers among the right-wing extremists, let me say this: Putin has his picture taken with representatives of Hamas and the Iranian government and deplores the civilian victims in Gaza whilst at the same time creating civilian victims in Ukraine. And his friends in Germany are certainly not friends of the Jews.

But I am also concerned about the anti-Semitism in parts of the political left, and sadly among young activists as well. Anti-colonialism must not lead to anti-Semitism. In this

respect, this part of the political left should review its arguments and distrust the big resistance narrative. The “both sides” argument is misleading here. Hamas is a murderous terrorist group fighting for the annihilation of the state of Israel and the death of all Jews. The clarity with which the German section of Fridays For Future, for example, has stated this, and the fact it has done so in contrast to its international friends, is more than respectable.

When I was in Turkey recently, it was thrown into my teeth that pro-Palestinian demonstrations are banned in Germany. And that Germany must also apply its humanitarian demands to the people in Gaza. I made it clear that criticism of Israel is of course allowed here. That it is not banned for people to stand up for the rights of the Palestinians and also their right to their own state. But calling for violence against Jews or celebrating violence against Jews is prohibited – and rightly so!

Yes, life in Gaza is life in poverty without prospects for the future. Yes, the settler movement in the West Bank is fomenting discord and robs the Palestinians of hope and rights and, increasingly, lives. And the suffering of the civilian population now at war is a fact, a terrible fact. Every dead child is one dead child too many.

I, too, call for humanitarian supplies, and am committed to ensuring that water, medicines, and relief supplies are delivered to Gaza, and that the refugees are protected. Together with our American friends, we are making it clear to Israel time and again that the protection of the civilian population is paramount. The death and suffering that is now engulfing the people of Gaza is terrible.

To say this is as necessary as it is legitimate. Systematic violence against Jews, however, can still not be legitimised by this. Anti-Semitism cannot be justified by this.

Of course, Israel must abide by international law and international standards. But the difference is this: would someone ever frame such expectations of Hamas?

And because I was recently confronted abroad with how the attack on Israel on the 7th of October was downplayed as – quote – an “unfortunate incident”, and even the facts were called into question, let me remind you here once again: it was Hamas, who cruelly murdered children, parents, and grandparents in their homes. Whose fighters mutilated corpses, kidnapped people and laughingly exposed them to public humiliation.

There are accounts of sheer horror – and yet Hamas is hailed as a freedom movement? This is a reversal of the facts, which we cannot allow to stand.

And this brings me to the last point:

The attack on Israel took place in a phase of rapprochement between several Muslim states and Israel. There are the Abraham Accords between Israel and Muslim countries of the region. Jordan and Israel are working together on a major drinking water project. Saudi Arabia was on the way to normalising its relations with Israel.

But peaceful coexistence of Israel and its neighbours, of Jews and Muslims, and the prospect of a two-state solution – are not what Hamas and its supporters, especially the Iranian government, want. They want to destroy it.

Those who have not given up hope for peace in the region, those who believe in the right of the Palestinians to a state of their own and a real perspective – as we do – must now differentiate in these difficult weeks.

And differentiating means to acknowledge that the murderous acts of Hamas are intended to prevent peace. Hamas does not want reconciliation with Israel, but the extermination of Israel.

And this is why it is pivotal to make it clear that Israel's right to exist must not be relativised. Israel's security is our obligation. Germany knows this.