

Germany Bans Public Grieving and Solidarity with Palestine

Germany's criminalization of solidarity with Palestine has taken on entirely new dimensions since October 7

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Germany is home to Europe's largest Palestinian community, with roughly 80,000 Palestinians living in the country. For years, German authorities have tried to stifle Palestinian activism in the country, viewing it as a nuisance to its explicit policy of "unconditional support for Israel." Demonstrations, such as one earlier this year to mark the 75th anniversary of the Nakba, have been sporadically banned in recent years and organizations, like the Palestinian prisoner solidarity network Samidoun, have also come under increasing scrutiny.

Yet the criminalization of solidarity with Palestine on a national level has taken on entirely new dimensions since October 7. After a small demonstration on Berlin's busy Sonnenallee street on the evening of October 7, the German media and body politic have been up in arms about Palestinians supposedly celebrating terrorism and antisemitism on German streets.

Talking points that were two weeks ago only uttered by far-right AfD politicians are now being openly expressed by politicians from all parliamentary parties in Germany. Playing off the idea of "imported antisemitism," the social democratic Chancellor Olaf Scholz is now arguing that "we must finally deport on a large scale" residents who do not hold German citizenship and openly protest against Israel. The Christian Democrats (CDU) are even demanding that the recognition of Israel's right to exist must become a precondition for German citizenship.

Samidoun has been made into public enemy number one, as the media presents the group

as a bastion for “sympathizers of terror” that poses “a particular danger, because as a secular organization, they are building bridges between Islamists and radical leftists.” In a speech before parliament on October 12, Chancellor Scholz personally announced a ban on Samidoun along with a ban on the activities of Hamas in Germany.

In Berlin specifically, which is home to one of the largest Palestinian diaspora communities outside the Arab world, the authorities have been particularly hostile towards any signs of solidarity with Palestine. Since October 7, every demonstration explicitly or implicitly referring to Palestine has been banned, leaving the roughly 30,000 Palestinians living in Berlin with no means of expressing their anguish at the siege and bombardment of Gaza.

Solidarity groups have been trying to bypass this censorship by avoiding political statements and focusing on humanitarian campaigning, yet even demonstrations and slogans such as “Children in Gaza need help” and “Solidarity with the civilian population in the Gaza Strip” were banned. On October 13, the police went so far as to ban a demonstration registered by the group “Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East” entitled “Jewish Berliners against violence in the Middle East.”

Sonnenallee, a busy street in the district in which many Arab migrants live, has become a focal point of dissent against Israel’s attack on Gaza. The police patrol Sonnenallee every evening with tight controls on the public squares. Racial profiling and [brutal arrests](#) are commonplace and often recorded and posted to social media. One particular video shows police officers [stomping out a candle-lit vigil](#) with their boots.

In a letter to all Berlin schools, the city’s Department for Education, Youth and Family set out strict guidelines on how to discuss the situation in Palestine with students. “Any demonstrative action or expression of opinion that can be understood as advocating or approving of the attacks against Israel or support for the terrorist organizations carrying them out, such as Hamas or Hezbollah, constitutes a threat to school peace in the current situation and is prohibited.” According to the letter, these may include the following: “visibly wearing relevant clothing (for example, the kuffiyeh known as the Palestinian scarf), displaying stickers and patches with inscriptions such as ‘free Palestine’ or a map of Israel in the colors of Palestine (white, red, black, green), and shouting ‘free Palestine!’ and demonstrating verbal support for Hamas and its terrorism.”

At one high school on Sonnenallee, a 61-year-old teacher attempted to confiscate a Palestinian flag from a 14-year-old student and ended up in a physical altercation with a second 15-year-old student. The parents’ association of the school tried to organize a demonstration under the slogan “No place for racism, no place for violence” as a reaction to the incident, yet it was promptly banned by the police, ostensibly as a “a precautionary measure”. The Central Council of Palestinians in Germany has since sent a letter in response to Berlin’s Department for Education, expressing their “great concern about the psychological and educational development [of their children]” in Berlin schools.

As other European states are witnessing mass protests in solidarity with Palestine, the German state has been able to use force and violence to prevent such scenes on German streets. Yet it is unlikely that the government will be able to ban these sentiments of solidarity indefinitely, especially as the images of Israel’s brutal attack on Gaza continue to circulate around the world.

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Featured image: Demonstrators in Berlin take the streets in solidarity with Palestine (Photo: Montecruz Foto)

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