

# German Interior Ministry attacks religious freedom with ban on the Islamic Centre Hamburg

Gregor Link  
29 July 2024

On Wednesday last week, the Federal Interior Ministry banned the Islamic Centre Hamburg (IZH) and its alleged offshoots in Berlin, Munich and Frankfurt am Main. The police stormed and searched a total of 53 mosques, prayer centres, club rooms and private homes in eight federal states and confiscated money, five properties and other assets. Four mosques were desecrated in the process.

In Hamburg, masked officers used rams and chainsaws to force their way into the Blue Mosque, the oldest Shia Mosque in Europe, which was subsequently placed under federal administration. The IZH is considered the centre of Shia Islam in Germany and has been under surveillance by the Hamburg *Verfassungsschutz* (domestic intelligence agency) since 1993. In November last year, the police carried out 55 house searches in seven federal states in order to secure evidence for the current ban.

The Sozialistische Gleichheitspartei (Socialist Equality Party, SGP) condemns these attacks on religious freedom in the strongest possible terms. They are directly linked to the pro-war campaign that the German government is waging against Iran together with its NATO partners and Israel. In preparation for an open war, opponents of the war are being intimidated on the home front and Muslim minorities are now also being terrorised across the board.

The Interior Ministry accuses the IZH of acting against the “constitutional order” and the “idea of international understanding,” supporting the Lebanese Hezbollah and posing a threat to democratic rights in Germany, among other things. Representatives of the ministry and the government also accuse the organisation of acting as a “spy nest,” “extended arm”

and “direct representative” of the Iranian regime.

All of these accusations are made without providing any concrete evidence. The most far-reaching is the accusation of being connected to Iran—the centre of the Shiite denomination. On the same grounds, the government could storm and seize Catholic churches and justify this by claiming that they are the “extended arm” and “direct representative” of the Vatican.

The Iranian foreign ministry responded to the ban on Wednesday by summoning the German ambassador, calling it a “hostile action” that was evidence of “Islamophobia” and “contradicts fundamental human rights principles.”

While police officers desecrated and confiscated Muslim institutions across Germany on her instructions, Interior Minister Nancy Faeser (Social Democrat, SPD) brazenly claimed to the press that this was “not directed against any religion.” The ministry made a “clear distinction between Islamists, against whom we are taking tough action, and the many Muslims who belong to our country and live their faith”. The “peaceful Shiite practice of faith and religion” was “not affected by our ban.”

In reality, the Interior Ministry is systematically blurring any distinction between violent jihadist groups—which are often instrumentalised by the NATO powers themselves—and forms of political activism, some of which are directed against racism and imperialism, under the term “Islamism.”

For example, on its website, the *Verfassungsschutz* includes among the “manifestations” of Islamism those tendencies that “deliberately take up current social and political issues” in order to “ascribe a ‘victim role’ to Muslims.” The

entry explicitly lists a number of Muslim groups protesting against the genocide in Gaza.

The state attack on the centre of a religious minority in Germany is an alarm signal and must be vehemently rejected. The fundamental criticism that socialists make of religious views does not mean providing any support for this frontal attack on democratic rights and religious freedom. The accusations levelled by the interior ministry are so general and the justification so flimsy that they can become the starting point for even more extensive attacks.

After opponents of the German-backed genocide in Gaza have been mistreated and prosecuted by the police for months, this police-state approach is now being extended to an entire religious community. This is intended to create conditions for intensifying Germany's pro-war policy towards Iran.

Following the summoning of the German ambassador to Iran, the Foreign Ministry provocatively announced that it was up to Iran to "take concrete steps to show that a change in relations with Germany and Europe is desired." Liberal Democratic Party (FDP) Secretary General Bijan Djir-Sarai—himself of Iranian origin—declared that "too much reliance has been placed on the nuclear agreement" in dealings with Iran to date. A *Tagesschau* report speaks approvingly of a "new political course towards Iran."

In fact, Iran has been subject to comprehensive sanctions by the European Union since 2011, which were drastically tightened in 2022. This contributed to a 15 percent fall in the value of the national currency against the US dollar in 2024 and inflation of 40 percent. During the same period, regimes such as Saudi Arabia—which is in no way inferior to Iran's in terms of its disregard for human rights—were awarded investment and arms deals worth billions. During a visit in January this year, Economics Minister Robert Habeck (Greens) signalled the German government's approval for the delivery of 48 Eurofighter fighter jets.

By intensifying this pro-war policy, the German government is aiming to participate in the imperialist redivision of the Middle East. On the same day that the Interior Ministry banned the IZH, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu delivered a fascist speech in the US Congress in which he outlined the progress of the genocide in the Gaza Strip to the assembled members. He accused the several thousand

demonstrators protesting against him in the city of having been paid by Iran and called on the jeering and applauding members of Congress to wage war on the country.

The latest Israeli attacks on Hezbollah in Lebanon are the realisation of this policy and threaten to set the entire Middle East on fire in order to enforce the imperialist interests of the NATO powers. The banning of the IZH is the preparation of this war on the home front.

On Thursday, as hundreds of people gathered in front of the closed Blue Mosque to pray and light candles, a spokesperson for the Hamburg *Verfassungsschutz* announced that "Iranian and Shiite Islamists will remain in [our] focus."



To contact the WSW and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)**