

Buchenwald concentration camp memorial site bans criticism of the Israeli genocide

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Declarations that any criticism of Israel's genocide in Gaza amounts to "antisemitism" and represents an abuse of Holocaust remembrance are assuming increasingly bizarre forms.

At a time when the crimes of the far-right Netanyahu government and the Israeli army against the Palestinian population are increasingly evident, with images of the devastation in Gaza resembling the Nazi terror against Jewish ghettos and starving Palestinian men, women and children recalling the emaciated victims of those in the Nazi concentration camps, the more violently officialdom in Germany seeks to suppress the growing opposition to these crimes.

It has now been revealed that the memorial site of the former Buchenwald concentration camp near Weimar has issued a manual to its security and educational staff that allows them to turn away visitors who express solidarity with the Palestinian population.

Under the heading "Problematic Brands, Codes, Symbols, and Signs of Right-Wing Extremist and Antisemitic Groups," the document lists the Palestinian scarf, the keffiyeh, and other Palestinian symbols on an equal footing with far-right symbols that have been used in the past to denigrate the memorial site and mock the victims.

It states: "Wearing the keffiyeh can, with a high probability, indicate sympathy with militant anti-Israel sentiment." Calls for a ceasefire in Gaza ("Ceasefire Now") and the display of a watermelon slice, whose red, white, and green colouring corresponds to the colours of the Palestinian flag, are also considered anti-Israel symbols and signs.

All of this is described as "Israel-related antisemitism" and an insult to the Jewish victims of the concentration camp, where numerous non-Jewish opponents of the Nazis were also murdered:

communists, social democrats, trade unionists and foreign slave labourers.

Back in April, a scandal erupted at the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration camp. Under pressure from the Israeli ambassador, memorial director Jens-Christian Wagner withdrew the renowned Israeli scholar and critic of Netanyahu, Omri Boehm, from speaking at the event.

Omri Boehm is the grandson of a Holocaust survivor and a fierce critic of the Netanyahu government. He condemns the war crimes in Gaza and advocates the idea of a bi-national Jewish-Palestinian state.

According to previously known figures, the Nazis deported a total of 280,000 people to Buchenwald and its 139 subcamps from the summer of 1937 onwards; 56,000 were murdered or died of starvation, disease, medical experiments or forced labor.

On April 11, 1945, surviving prisoners, mostly members of the German Communist Party (KPD), organized an armed uprising, arrested over 100 remaining SS guards, and surrendered the camp to arriving American troops. By then, most of the responsible Nazi henchmen, commanders and guards had already fled.

"Today, the memorial—in addition to its functions as a cemetery and place of remembrance—is a place of learning open to all those who approach the historical site with the intention of ensuring that its history is never repeated," states the memorial's website.

There is no doubt that since the 1990s, there have been repeated abhorrent actions by right-wing radicals seeking to misuse Buchenwald for their reactionary and fascist purposes. The memorial's website lists numerous examples. It is entirely legitimate for the institution's staff to oppose this. However, the signs

and symbols listed in the “handbook” have nothing to do with such actions; instead they take very seriously the slogan “Never again!”

It was above all the surviving prisoners of Buchenwald who coined the famous oath “Never again fascism, never again war,” in 1945. Now, protests against the mass murder being carried out by a far-right government are being prohibited. Anyone who takes seriously the slogan propounded by the memorial on its website, “The destruction of Nazism and its roots is our motto. The construction of a new world of peace and freedom is our goal,” and calls Israeli crimes in the Gaza Strip by their name, risks expulsion from the memorial.

The 57-page handout for employees and security personnel sparked fierce protests on social media. Memorial director Wagner attempted to downplay his responsibility, claiming it was an internal document that he was unaware of. It had been made public by the judiciary in Schleswig-Holstein, something which should not have happened.

Wagner stated that some formulations would be revised. For example, there was talk of “disputed territories,” but it should actually be “occupied territories.” Furthermore, it should be made clear that criticism of the Israeli government’s policies is not “per se antisemitic.”

The commemoration ceremony in April revealed the worthlessness of such remarks. When a young participant, in her presentation in English, dared to use the word “genocide” and declared that we must learn lessons from Buchenwald and speak out against injustices today, Wagner intervened. He lectured the young woman that while one could mourn the innocent Palestinians killed, it was inappropriate to speak of a “genocide” at a place like Buchenwald.

The phrases prohibited in the “handout” are denounced in Germany as “left-wing antisemitism.” The document is apparently based on the resolution passed by the Bundestag on November 7, 2024, titled “Never again is now—Protecting, preserving, and strengthening Jewish life in Germany.”

This resolution refers to the controversial definition of antisemitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), according to which not only antisemitism by extremists and neo-Nazis, but also left-wing criticism of the policies of the far-right

Israeli government and its armed forces is considered “antisemitism.” The IHRA definition is cited as a source in the footnotes of the memorial paper.

There was fierce opposition to the Bundestag resolution in 2024, and an open letter was signed by more than 2,000 journalists, artists and academics. Many Jews who disagree with the genocide in Gaza are also being treated as antisemites, such as those from the Jewish community, for example, the association “Jewish Voice for Just Peace in the Middle East,” which the German domestic intelligence service denigrates as extremist.

On this basis, a lecture by the psychoanalyst Iris Hefets on the campus of the University of Bremen, titled, “Silence and Guilt—Psychological Mechanisms in Dealing with the Genocide in Gaza” was also recently banned. Hefets is a member of “Jewish Voice.”

The Buchenwald Memorial’s document adopts the same line. It even attempts to wield the anti-communist cudgel by declaring that “communists” have attempted to “use the historical site for their own purposes, including their anti-Zionist positions.” This refers to protests by some left-wing groups at past events. After the Shoah and the founding of the Israeli state, anti-Zionism “must be viewed as a form of antisemitism,” the paper states.

In this way, the memorial management makes itself jointly responsible for the policy of the German government, which supplies the Netanyahu regime with weapons it uses in the brutal mass murder of Palestinians.



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