

World Children's Day in Berlin: Michael Barenboim accuses the German government of complicity in genocide at musicians flash mob for Gaza

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Since the commencement of the Israeli war against the Palestinians nearly two years ago, the German-Jewish violinist Michael Barenboim—son of outstanding musician and conductor, Daniel Barenboim—has been one of the most active defenders of the rights of the people of Palestine. From the age of 14, Michael Barenboim has been a member of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, his father's innovative project bringing together leading young Israeli and Arab musicians.

On Saturday, 21 September—World Children's Day—Michael Barenboim was the main speaker at a gathering of musicians in Berlin's historic Gendarmenmarkt, home to the city's magnificent concert house.

Against a background of huge blowups of some of the small children murdered in Gaza by Israeli military bombardments, and following a thoroughly moving program of classical and Arabic music by the assembled mass choir and orchestra consisting of international singers and musicians, the distinguished violinist Barenboim listed the crimes carried out by the Israeli army under the direction of the fascist-dominated cabinet in Jerusalem.

To the repeated refrain “Today is World Children's Day” Barenboim noted:

Israel's genocide of Palestinians is also a cruel mass murder of children. In Gaza, at least one school class is murdered by Israel every day. This is the third school year in which Palestinian children have no access to education because Israel has already destroyed 90 per cent of the schools. There are more children with amputations in Gaza than anywhere else in the world. A new acronym had to be created to describe a bitter, cruel reality: “wounded child/no surviving family.”

Barenboim paid tribute to the hundreds of doctors and rescue workers who have been killed in the course of the Israeli siege of Gaza, paying special attention to the individual toddlers and children who have been maimed, starved or killed in hails of bullets and bombs, such as the six-year-old girl Hind Rajab, who died with her relatives in a car riddled with over 350 bullets in Gaza City on 29 January 2024.

Barenboim continued:

Many more nameless children are dying, are injured, are being operated on without anesthesia, are starving. Their desperate cries are burned into our memory. They are not burned, however, into

the memory of complicit German politicians.

Barenboim recalled that on 9 October, 2023, Israel's then-Defence Minister Yoav Galant declared: “No water, no food, no electricity, no petrol. These are human animals and we are acting accordingly.” Since then, he said, “Israel's intention to destroy the Palestinians as a national group, in whole or in part, has been visible to the whole world.”

He concluded:

The perpetration of war crimes and the sadistic joy of Israeli criminals in their deeds would not be possible without the military, logistical and diplomatic support of states such as Germany. That is why Germany is being charged before the International Court of Justice for complicity in genocide.

Barenboim's powerful and moving indictment of the German government was greeted with huge applause by the large audience which had gathered at Berlin's central Gendarmenmarkt.

WSWS reporters spoke with a number of participants and members of the audience, including Janne, a young violinist who took part in the spontaneous concert with her friend Zora:

I came here because I cannot tolerate this situation. I have come to use my instrument to protest against the genocide in Gaza and give a voice to the children who are starved, killed and displaced every day by Israel.

I find US president Trump's proposal to turn Gaza into some sort of Riviera for the rich an absurd and terrible idea, a dreadful violation of human rights. I don't know how anyone in the world can regard this as a good solution. As musicians we alone cannot stop this genocide, but our government could stop the genocide and must do so. It should exert pressure wherever it can; it should sanction Israel. Its pledge to stop some weapon supplies to Israel is not enough and the German government still imports much weaponry from Israel! Chancellor Merz said nothing about this and it is absurd to make and spend money to wage war.

All of the parties in the German parliament have supported the genocide. I am particularly disappointed with the Greens and the role played by [former Foreign Minister and Green Party leader]

Annalena Baerbock.

I am a member of the Greens but am very critical of the party's positions and have been considering leaving the party for a long time. I miss the fact there has been no proper reflection or admission that the party acted wrongly, any acknowledgement that the party drew the wrong conclusions and must take responsibility, including politically for their unconditional support for Israel. This is completely missing, and I am really disappointed.

Thomas is a Jewish citizen living in Germany who attended the rally with his wife:

My own father survived the concentration camp but almost all of my other relatives were murdered in Auschwitz. That is why I grew up with a sense of solidarity, peace and friendship from an early age. When I see what is happening in Gaza today, another genocide, while many people are watching or looking away, I cannot reconcile that with my soul and conscience.

It brings tears to one's eyes, but also the determination to fight together with Palestinians, Muslims, Christians, Jews and humanists to put an end to this genocide.

I have a very critical opinion of the German media, which shies away from showing the reality of what is taking place. On other media you can witness this genocide live every day. Today, you can't say, "I didn't know." Anyone can find out if they want to. And that is also my task: to call on the public to show solidarity in order to fight this genocide.

In response to the remark that the Nazis had sought to shield from the public the full extent of their murderous campaign against the Jews in World War II he said:

Today, the fascists no longer show any restraint; they openly profess their support for this genocide. And fascism is not dependent on religion or ethnicity. Fascism exists in all religions and ethnicities. The Israeli regime is both antisemitic and fascist; it is a fascist regime. Jews can also be fascists, but we are humanists and we fight together. When you declare that the greatest danger and enemy of the Jewish population is the regime in Israel, that's absolutely right.

Thomas is retired and came all the way from Hamburg to attend the rally in Berlin.

I am here to show that I do not agree with our government, with those in charge. They confuse humanity with guilt. Acknowledging guilt involves feeling some sort of responsibility for the fate of other people, and that includes all victims, regardless of their names or where they come from.

The Jews were dispersed throughout the Ottoman Empire, in North Africa, and in Palestine when they were persecuted. These peoples offered them protection. The radical nationalists today on both sides, whether Arabs or Israelis, don't understand this. They are fueling the fire. They have no idea about history or are simply cold and inhumane.

Entire Arab countries have resigned themselves to the situation

in Gaza and are exploiting it. Many leaders of Arab countries are – as is almost always the case – obsessed with power and do whatever is necessary to stay in power. They try to hypnotise the people to lose interest in the oppressed of this world, in the Palestinians.

The radicals on all sides are harming the cause of the people by inflaming the situation. The radicals in the Israeli government, Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, were already criminals before entering the government. They burned olive trees, symbols of peace. They persecuted and drove out poor farmers who had nothing to do with politics and burned down their fields. But there are also other Israelis who oppose them. That is our hope. There are others internationally. I hope that through such collaboration peace will prevail.

Responding to an article on the WSWS, "Attack on Gaza City," which quotes the US State Secretary Marco Rubio referring to Palestinians as "barbaric animals," Thomas responded:

This is how it goes: the enemy is always dehumanised. If the enemies are "animals," then anything is allowed. All those who say this are narcissists and egomaniacs. They have no empathy whatsoever. I also agree that there is a connection between these crimes in Gaza and the German government's demands to make Germany fit for war. The warmongers are exploiting this situation to win us over to something that is actually immensely harmful. We must work for peace and not become war-ready! Are we back in the Third Reich?!

A grandmother with her grandchild also spoke to the WSWS:

I came here today because I want to demonstrate against German involvement in the terrible genocide in Gaza! I am here because the German government's stance does not help Jewish people, especially Jewish people in Germany and Palestinian people, who are being silenced, and because I simply stand for humanity, for the value of every human life.

I have a friend of Jewish descent. She is afraid because she senses that genuine antisemitism is growing, because people fail to distinguish between the Zionists on the one hand and moderate Jews on the other. The old narratives are being revived and are becoming very strong. Genuine antisemitic narratives are being exploited by the right wing. This is deplorable.

I agree with you that the Jewish community's greatest enemy is the Israeli government. They are opening the door to antisemitism and it is simply unacceptable when Germany fails to support the Palestinian people and give voice to Palestinian suffering! When you start to weigh human life by different criteria you very quickly end up with fascist thinking. So, either every human life counts or none! Now you have a situation where the fascist AfD (Alternative for Germany) agrees with the government regarding its support for Israel.

I see some connection between Gaza and the demand of the German government that we be "fit for war" and have a huge problem with the demand for military readiness.

To understand what is happening in Gaza today it is necessary to study the history of German-Israeli relations, which is bound up with Germany whitewashing its crimes. It began with the first post-

war federal government led by Adenauer. It had nothing to do with an altruistic stance. Germany didn't want to deal properly with its history, and it suited politicians here that Israel was willing to strike a deal allowing Germany to pursue its interests in the Middle East. I grew up in East Germany and no one really talked about the Nakba. Ultimately, we haven't really taken our responsibility seriously, not even with regard to the Shoah.

I am a great admirer of those like Daniel and Michael Barenboim, who are playing a positive role with their musical academy and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which for decades strived to foster dialogue and friendship between Jews and Arabs and the international community.

The valiant stand taken by Michael Barenboim and many other musicians at the concert in Berlin at the weekend reflects a growing realisation among artists that the German and other European governments are complicit in genocide and that the leading members of these governments must be held to account for the war crimes being committed on a daily basis in Gaza and the West Bank.



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