

Germany: Large Jewish delegation supports Costantino Ciervo's exhibition “COMUNE – The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict”

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Following its opening in the middle of November, the exhibition “COMUNE – The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict” by Italian artist Costantino Ciervo, was confronted with a campaign of intimidation and threats by Zionist networks, German politicians and a broad swathe of the press. The aim of these forces was to defame the artist as antisemitic and close down the exhibition at the Fluxus+ Museum in Potsdam (near Berlin).

In response, Ciervo issued a short video on Facebook and Instagram defending the exhibition's concept and repudiating the slanderous claims of antisemitism. In the course of a few weeks, the video (in German, English and Italian) has been seen and positively received by a worldwide public. In Spain alone, the video has been liked over 40,000 times. In addition to the tens of thousands of likes, many artists, intellectuals, youth and workers have posted messages of support.

One of Italy's best known cultural figures, the Bulgarian-born Italian Jewish actor, musician, singer, author and activist Moni Ovadio posted: “I find your work important in trying to convey how senseless the Netanyahu government's genocidal policies are. It is provocative symbolism, but it hits the nail on the head. Thank you.”

From Mexico, the artist Luis Velarde applauded the Fluxus+ Museum in Potsdam for displaying the exhibition, describing it as: “The last museum in Europe with dignity.”

The visitors' book to the museum is also overwhelmingly filled with statements praising the artist for his courage in presenting the exhibition. Further significant statements of support are included at the end of this article.

The most important new development was the visit to the exhibition on Sunday by a large delegation from the organisation Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East. Jewish Voice is the leading organisation of Jews in Germany that has sided unequivocally with the oppressed Palestinians and denounced the genocidal policies of the Israeli government. Members of the organisation have been arrested many times by the German police for voicing their opposition to the Merz coalition government's collaboration in the Israeli genocide. Jewish Voice has been labelled “left extremist” by the German domestic security agency (Verfassungsschutz) and has had its bank accounts annulled.

I spoke with Mila, an executive member of Jewish Voice at the exhibition.

Steinberg: You are here with a large delegation from Jewish Voice. First of all, I would like to know your opinion about the exhibition. It is being heavily criticised from Zionist forces which have claimed that it and the artist antisemitic. What is your own reaction to the exhibition?

Mila: I find the exhibition to be important and courageous and also

refreshing because the artist Costantino Ciervo has attempted, at a time of a brutal, ongoing colonial massacre against the Palestinian people, to use the figures he depicts in his pictures to convey a message of sisterhood and humanity. At the same time he does not ignore the issue of colonisation, but rather makes it a topic of discussion with his inclusion of the map of a disappearing Palestine—the process whereby, since the Balfour Declaration in 1917 and during the period before and after the Nakba, the Palestinians have had their land taken away by Israel.

Ciervo also shows that in this region, economic interests, and above all US interests, are actually at the forefront as the source and root cause of this terrible violence.

With regard to the defamation and smear campaign against the exhibition, we see a recurring pattern against both Ciervo and the Fluxus+ Museum. In this case, there were mainly three people responsible for this campaign, Evgeni Koutikou from the Jewish Community in Potsdam, Volker Beck [Green Party] from the German-Israeli Society and Andreas Büttner, who is both the antisemitism commissioner for the state of Brandenburg and a member of the Left Party. Together with the bourgeois press, they launched a smear campaign against the exhibition in order to defame both the artworks and the artist as antisemitic.

We see how Zionist forces strive to undermine all freedom of expression and artistic freedom in the name of German *raison d'état*, i.e., in the name of unconditional support for the genocidal state of Israel. What is extremely interesting is that the exhibition actually focuses on a message of shared humanity. Take, for example, the picture of Anne Frank wearing a keffiyah and writing on a tablet. Ciervo has transported Anne Frank into the present and presents her with a keffiyah as an act of solidarity. This makes clear that it is precisely these politicians and Zionist antisemitism commissioners who are actually contributing to the eradication of Palestinian identity when they defame such an image.

Another important point is the appropriation of these forces, the appropriation of the Holocaust and the history of Jewish people in Europe under fascism. In relation to the exhibition, my main thought is how important it is, especially at this time, to make comparisons, when this is done in a careful and respectful manner. Comparing genocides. Comparing circumstances when people are dehumanized, deprived of their rights, robbed and murdered en masse.

I took the opportunity of our visit today and our message of solidarity with the artist and the exhibition to reread Anne Frank's diaries and want to read an excerpt from them. “I get frightened myself when I think of close friends who are now at the mercy of the cruellest monsters ever to stalk the earth.” This quote could be applied exactly to a Palestinian girl in Gaza today, who has to watch how all the people she knows, all the

people she loves, and her entire family are at the mercy of IDF soldiers and are being murdered by them.

Steinberg: Can you tell us a little about the work of the Jewish Voice?

Mila: Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Middle East has been around for over 20 years. We are a peace organization and demand justice for all people between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, an end to the illegal Israeli occupation, an end to the apartheid regime, the right of return for displaced Palestinians, and, of course, an immediate bilateral military embargo against Israel and an end to the genocide.

Steinberg: You are also victims of German state measures. Can you say a little bit about that?

Mila: We have been declared an extremist organisation by the German domestic intelligence agency along with several other pro-Palestinian organisations. This intimidation is part of the larger context of the brutal repression of all forms of Palestine solidarity in Germany.

The point is that our presence threatens the Zionist and state narrative that any expression of solidarity with the Palestinian people, any call for freedom for the Palestinian people, is *per se* antisemitic. That is why they want to silence our voice, perhaps even eliminate our organization.

Fortunately we have many friends, and we will not stop for as long as it is necessary. But above all, what is already clear is that through the sacrifice of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in recent years, the Zionist narrative is crumbling, even in Germany, where it was so firmly entrenched and so deeply part of German culture, official education and the institutions.

The WSWS editorial board received the following additional statements in solidarity with the exhibition:

Hello, dear museum team,

I would like to thank you and Costantino Ciervo for the exhibition "COMUNE – The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict." I saw it before Christmas.

I found the large picture of Anne Frank wearing a Palestinian scarf particularly fitting. Recently, I found a passage in Anne's short stories from 1944 under the heading "Give!" (it's about social inequality), a passage by the then 15-year-old that seems to me to underline the humane nature of the exhibition, which is exposed to vicious political agitation, in which the Brandenburg state antisemitism commissioner Andreas Büttner (Left Party) is particularly prominent.

"All people are born equal; as babies, they were helpless and unblemished. All people breathe the same air, many believe in the same God. And yet the difference between many is still so unspeakably great. It is great because so many have never realized what the difference actually is, because if they had, they would have quickly realized that there is no difference!"

I would like to take this opportunity to wish Costantino Ciervo much strength and inspiration for his future projects.

Bernd Huber, musician from Berlin

Dear Fluxus board & staff,

I was concerned to hear of defamatory accusations of antisemitism being used to justify shutting down Costantino Ciervo's exhibition "COMUNE – The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict" at the Fluxus+ Museum in Potsdam.

It is nonsense to call this fine art antisemitic when it envisions both Jews and Palestinian Arabs living together in peace. Zionists are undoubtedly triggered by the concept that an ethnosectarian committing genocide is

undesirable, while a democratic state offering equal rights and opportunities to all is the preference of most of the indigenous people of Palestine.

Do not embarrass yourselves by suppressing this exhibition at the behest of Zionists in Germany.

Art is supposed to make us think. Please, think harder.

Sincerely, Lisa Savage, Solon, Maine, USA

Dear Sirs,

I hereby declare my strong support for the exhibition "COMUNE – The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict" by Costantino Ciervo at the FLUXUS+ Museum in Potsdam. I demand that the exhibition be allowed to remain as it is.

The attacks on the exhibition are a clear attack on artistic freedom. They attack the right to political expression and the possibility of a critical, humanistic examination of the causes and consequences of the Israeli attack on Palestine.

The accusations against Ciervo are not directed against antisemitic incitement, but against Ciervo's artistic representation of Jews and Palestinians—with their common historical, cultural and human roots. Attempts to brand this critical art as supposed "terrorism glorification" serve to stifle legitimate criticism of the genocide in Gaza and the support for this crime by Western governments and lobby groups.

Ciervo's work is deeply humanistic: it highlights shared humanity, exposes the economic and geopolitical interests that fuel the conflict, and proposes a perspective in which people live together as equals.

This exhibition—in its current form—is very important, especially at a time when the government and lobby groups are trying to delegitimize any criticism of the continuation of war and ethnic cleansing as "antisemitism." The criminal complaint filed by Volker Beck, president of the German-Israeli Society, against the exhibition represents a further escalation of the campaign against the artist and his rejection of dividing people according to religious or ethnic affiliation.

The defense of Ciervo's exhibition is not merely a cultural issue, but part of the struggle against the erosion of our democratic rights. The International Criminal Court has clearly condemned the policy of destruction in Gaza as genocide; in this context, it is clear that art and culture can and must play a central role in promoting conscious resistance to defamation, racism and social inequality.

Any concession to calls for censorship would not only harm the artist and his work, but would also send a signal to all those involved in cultural policy that critical positions are no longer protected.

I therefore urge you to:

- Defend the exhibition in its current form.
- Take a stand against equating criticism of Israeli government policy with antisemitism.
- Make it clear that cultural institutions have a social responsibility that goes beyond conforming to state or lobbyist interests: they must preserve spaces for critical thinking, historical reflection and solidarity.

Sincerely

Angela Niklaus

Against the Zionist censorship campaign by Volker Beck and the German press!

Defend the artist Costantino Ciervo and the Potsdam Museum Fluxus+!

Volker Beck is leading a shameful witch-hunt against artistic freedom. Beck's criminal complaint against the artist Costantino Ciervo and the Potsdam Museum Fluxus+ is not a legal proceeding, but a political act of intimidation. It is part of a "coordinated campaign" in which "Zionist lobby groups and the German press" are attempting to silence any opposition to the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Volker Beck, who poses as a moralist, is in reality completely

untrustworthy. By criminalizing the depiction of Anne Frank wearing a keffiyeh, he wants to ban the obvious: the realization that oppression is universal.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* correctly analyzes, the exhibition aims to highlight the “historical, anthropological, and linguistic similarities between ordinary Jews and Palestinians”—which is precisely what Beck and the German state fear. They do not want “brotherhood” or a “Pale-Judea” beyond nation states, but the unconditional defense of an Israeli state that is currently committing genocide.

Those who, like Beck, cover up Israel’s war of extermination make themselves accomplices. They are effectively acting as right-wing extremist agitators who abuse Germany’s “historical guilt” to justify new crimes. It is a perverse logic: the German government is trying to “rid itself of its historical role in the Shoah by unconditionally supporting Israel—even if that means supporting a government of ultra-right-wing Zionists who are committing genocide.”

The attacks on Ciervo, orchestrated by figures such as Beck and seconded by media outlets such as *Stern* and *Zeit*, follow the same pattern as the censorship of UN Special Rapporteur Francesca Albanese. This is not about antisemitism. It is about enforcing the geopolitical interests of German and US imperialism in the Middle East against all resistance.

I demand the immediate cessation of all investigations. Hands off Costantino Ciervo and the Fluxus+ Museum!

Andreas Niklaus

We call on our readers to write letters of support for the exhibition and send them via email (info@fluxusplus.de) to the museum, with copies to the WSWS editorial board (sgp@gleichheit.de).



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact