

Walter Baier 7.10.2024 Karlsplatz Vienna

Speech at the vigil on the first anniversary of the massacre on 7 October 2023

No nation can wage war against the rest of the world

We come together on this sad anniversary to do the obvious: to mourn the loss of sons, daughters, grandchildren, mothers, fathers, siblings, wives, husbands, work and study colleagues.

You might think that this list of the victims' social connections is irrelevant. But this is not the case, because we must not allow the abstract language of war to become one. The victims on the battlefields are not statistics; it is not ideologies, religions or nations that die in the bombed-out camps and cities, but people who hope, expect and design their lives, on which the hopes, expectations and life designs of their neighbours are built.

Only then does the monstrosity of 7 October, the subsequent war and every war become comprehensible.

I am a communist and, like my generation, was politicised by the US imperialist war in Vietnam. All my political life I have been an opponent of imperialism and colonialism. However, my peers and I would never have thought of misunderstanding a massacre of civilians, such as the one carried out by Hamas on 7 October, as an act in a legitimate struggle for liberation.

I sympathise with the Israeli people who are remembering the victims in their own community on this day. But I cannot share my grief with those here in Austria who lament the suffering of the Israeli side but ignore the deaths of 50,000 or 100,000 Palestinians who have fallen victim to the war unleashed by Israel.

Let's talk openly: The one-sided empathy of politicians and the media for the Israeli victims is a half-empathy, a selective empathy.

It is morally flawed. It recognises, without saying it, that Palestinian life is considered inferior. It is racist. And it is above all instrumental, because it serves to justify the state terrorism perpetrated against the Palestinians and to prepare us for the crimes that will follow.

I have spoken on another occasion about my grandmother who was murdered in Auschwitz and my father who survived the camp and said that I find it an insulting imposition on the victims of National Socialism and their descendants to claim that the crimes committed against Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, Lebanon and Syria were committed in their name.

Not all Jews have drawn the conclusion from the Shoah to become Zionists. But be that as it may, Netanyahu and his predecessors have transformed the Zionist utopia into the dystopia of an apartheid state. They have turned the idea of liberating the Jewish people into the practice of disenfranchising the population that has inhabited Palestine for

many generations. A practice that today reaches a tragic climax in ethnic cleansing and a genocidal war.

It is difficult for me to say it: Israel today is a pariah state ostracised by the world community.

And that is why the true friends of the Israeli people are not those who enable the insane policies of its right-wing extremists by supplying arms and encouraging them by taking sides. The true friends today are those who criticise this policy worldwide, on the campuses of universities in the USA, in the streets of London, Copenhagen, Madrid, Dublin and many other places, and who are denigrated as anti-Semites because of it: Yannis Varoufakis, Stefan Schulmeister -- anti-Semites, President Lula, the Pope, the Secretary General of the United Nations, the judges of the International Criminal Court - all anti-Semites.

I always thought that our goal must be to reduce the number of anti-Semites. Today we are witnessing how the defenders of the right-wing extremist government in Israel are busy denouncing more and more people as anti-Semites.

No nation can wage war against the rest of the world in the long run.

When Israel began its invasion of Lebanon, a verse by Bertolt Brecht came to mind

‘Great Carthage fought three wars. It was still mighty after the first, still habitable after the second. It could no longer be found after the third.’

Today, we are on the brink of a major regional war that could escalate into a world war due to the involvement of the superpowers.

There is still a chance to stop this course of events.

That is why we are calling for an immediate ceasefire and the start of negotiations that will lead to comprehensive peace and the creation of a Palestinian state that exists alongside Israel in peace and security.

As Pope Francis said recently, this does not require more weapons, but dialogue.

We call for an arms embargo against Israel, as demanded by French President Macron, and economic sanctions, not because we want to destroy Israel, but to put an end to the murder ordered by its government.