

Response to Request for Expert Opinion on Antisemitism

On the question of the antisemitic meaning of the depiction “Anne Frank with a Keffiyeh” at the Museum FLUXUS+ Potsdam, Germany, submitted by the Simon Wiesenthal Center, founded in 1977 in honour of Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal and the 6 million Jews murdered by the Nazis during the Holocaust, requested by Dr. Andreas Büttner, antisemitism commissioner of the Federal State of Brandenburg, Germany.

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I. Mandate and Question Presented

[1] The subject of this expert opinion is the examination of whether the depiction of Anne Frank wearing a keffiyeh (Palestinian scarf), shown at the Museum FLUXUS+ as part of the exhibition “*COMUNE – The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict*” contains antisemitic semantic elements.

[2] The decisive factor is not the subjective intention of the artists or curators, but rather the *objective meaning of the work within its historical, political, and memory-cultural context*, as well as its impact when assessed in light of recognized definitions of antisemitism.

II. Facts of the Case

[3] In the aforementioned exhibition, an artistic depiction of Anne Frank is displayed in which she is shown wearing a keffiyeh. According to the exhibition’s own description, the exhibition addresses the “paradox of similarity in the Middle East conflict.”

[4] The motif triggered public criticism from Jewish organizations and political actors. According to the museum, no antisemitic intention was intended; the work is meant to be understood as a universal symbol against violence. At the same time, the museum acknowledged that the image had caused irritation.



Anne Frank in Kaffiyeh at Museum FLUXUS+.

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III. Standards of Evaluation

1. IHRA Working Definition

The Simon Wiesenthal Center played an active role in the development and international promotion of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism. Today, the Center also participates in the work of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance through Dr. Ariel Gelblung, its Director for Latin America, who serves as part of Argentina's official IHRA delegation.

[5] The [Working Definition of Antisemitism of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#) (IHRA), which has been politically adopted by the German federal government, defines antisemitism as a certain perception of Jews that may be expressed as hatred toward Jews.

[6] Among the manifestations identified by the IHRA are, inter alia:

- Holocaust distortion or relativization
- Comparisons of Israeli policy with that of the National Socialists
- The application of double standards to Israel
- The delegitimization of the Jewish state's right to exist

[7] The definition is not a criminal law instrument, but an analytical and evaluative framework.

2. Secondary and Israel-Related Antisemitism

[8] Antisemitism research distinguishes, particularly after 1945, the phenomenon of secondary antisemitism (“antisemitism after Auschwitz”), which manifests itself through deflection of guilt, relativization, or instrumentalization of the Shoah.

[9] Israel-related antisemitism exists when antisemitic patterns of thought are transferred to the State of Israel, particularly through demonization, delegitimization, or Nazi comparisons.

3. Constitutional Framework

[10] Freedom of art is protected under Article 5(3) of the [Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany](#).

[11] However, this protection is not unlimited.

[12] The guarantee of human dignity under *Article 1 of the Basic Law* has overriding normative force. The remembrance of the Shoah forms an integral component of the normative self-understanding of the Federal Republic of Germany.

[13] Even if a work may be legally permissible under criminal law, it may nonetheless convey antisemitic semantics.

IV. Symbol Analysis

1. Anne Frank as an Icon of Remembrance

[14] Anne Frank stands worldwide as a symbol of the Jewish victims of the Shoah—including 1.5 million Jewish children mass murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators. She is not an abstract figure but a concrete murdered Jewish child.

[15] Her iconic status is inseparably linked to the Nazi policy of extermination.

[16] Any artistic recoding of this figure therefore *directly touches German memory culture*.

2. The Keffiyeh as a Political Symbol

[17] Historically, the keffiyeh functions as a symbol of identity and protest within Palestinian national movements.

[18] Within the context of an exhibition dealing with the Middle East conflict, it carries clear political connotations.

[19] The combination of these two symbols therefore does not constitute an accidental aesthetic connection, but rather a premeditated politically charged statement. Its imagery fits into a larger global campaign depicting Israeli Jews as latter-day Nazis.

V. Perversion of the Memory of the Holocaust as a Weapon of Antisemitism

1. Holocaust Relativization through Universalization

[20] The museum interprets the motif as a universal symbol against violence.

[21] However, problematic is the de-contextualization of Anne Frank's specifically Jewish fate.

[22] When the Shoah is recoded into a general comparison of violence, it loses its historical singularity.

[23] Such universalization can therefore be interpreted as a form of Holocaust relativization.

2. Holocaust Inversion

[24] Antisemitism research describes the phenomenon of Holocaust inversion, in which Jews or the Jewish state are symbolically placed in the role of the Nazis.

[25] The visual pairing "Anne Frank + keffiyeh" within a Middle East context suggests a comparative structure:

- Then: Jews as victims
- Now: Palestinians as the "new Jews"
- Implicitly: Israel as the "new Nazis"

[26] Even if not explicitly articulated, the suggestion is structurally embedded in the image.

[27] The IHRA explicitly lists Nazi comparisons in the context of Israel as an example of antisemitism.

3. Instrumentalization of Jewish Victims

[28] Anne Frank is not remembered as an individual but used as the bearer of a contemporary political narrative.

[29] Such instrumentalization may be understood as a form of degradation.

[30] Jewish organizations have criticized this depiction precisely as such an instrumentalization.

[31] The use of a murdered Jewish child to illustrate a political comparison in the Middle East conflict is capable of distorting the memory of the victims.

4. Delegitimization through Symbolic Politics

[32] The work does not operate through argumentation but through symbolic politics.

[33] Symbolic politics replaces differentiated analysis with moral equivalences.

[34] If Israel is implicitly placed in proximity to Nazi perpetrators, this constitutes a form of Israel-related antisemitism.

5. Effect within the German Context

[35] In Germany, remembrance of the Shoah carries particular normative significance.

[36] A work that debases Anne Frank's memory by injecting the unfounded claim that Israel intentionally targets children, like the Nazis targeted Jewish children including Anne Frank, whether in Gaza, Lebanon or Iran, endangers the millions of Jews in Israel and every Jew living in the diaspora, including Germany, which continues to experience spikes of anti-Jewish hate crimes.

[37] What is decisive is the objective effect on German Jews and Jewry around the world, not the claimed intention.

VI. Conclusion

[38] Within the given exhibition context, the depiction “Anne Frank with a keffiyeh”:

- relativizes the Shoah
- activates patterns of Holocaust inversion
- politically instrumentalizes the memory of Jewish victims of Nazi Germany
- reproduces and legitimizes campaign that compares Israel to Nazis
- reinforces narratives that portray Israelis as “today’s Nazis,” a well-documented form of antisemitic moral inversion inspiring rising antisemitism

[39] On the basis of the IHRA Working Definition and the research literature on secondary and Israel-related antisemitism, **the work must therefore be classified as antisemitic.**

[40] This assessment does not address the issue of possible criminal liability or subjective intentions of the artist.

References

Federal Ministry of the Interior / German Federal Government: Adoption of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism, 2017.

[International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance](#): Working Definition of Antisemitism, 2016.

[Federal Agency for Civic Education](#) (bpb):

- Secondary Antisemitism
- Israel-related Antisemitism
- Symbolic Politics

[Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany](#):

- Article 1 (Human Dignity)
- Article 5 (Freedom of Art)

[German Criminal Code](#):

- §189 StGB (Defamation of the Memory of the Deceased)
- §130 StGB (Incitement to Hatred)

[Museum FLUXUS+](#): Press release on the exhibition “*COMUNE – The Paradox of Similarity in the Middle East Conflict.*”

[Yad Vashem Friendship Association Germany](#): Statement on the instrumentalization of Anne Frank in the Potsdam museum.

[Jüdische Allgemeine](#): Reporting on the controversy surrounding the Anne Frank image at the museum.