



We Will Continue to Work Together

Dinner Speech of the President of the Max-Planck-Gesellschaft

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On the Occasion of the Minerva Weizmann Meeting

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Dear Vice Consul Kasa Harbor, dear colleagues,

When we travelled to Israel with a delegation shortly after October 7 last year, we experienced a country in shock. A colleague explained to me how this act of terror had awakened existential fears. What he said resonated with me, because it put the events of October 7 in a larger context. As a child, he said, his mother-in-law had to hide from the Nazis for two years and was constantly frightened. He said he had often heard this story. But only now did he understand it.

Dear friends from Israel,

When we met at Jerusalem at the time, I had said that we will not leave you alone in these difficult times. I had also said that criticism of the government is necessary, but that we will not tolerate anti-Semitism. All of this still applies today. I can assure you. We can assure you.

In the meantime, things have developed dramatically. Israel is defending itself and there is great suffering in the whole region. At the same time, compassion for the Israeli people in the world is declining. What's more, Israel is being isolated. Anti-Semitic slogans are being heard again. Many Jewish people, including students at universities, do not feel safe anymore, also here in Germany.

Dear colleagues at the Max Planck Society,

We have to be honest to ourselves: We cannot imagine how it is like to be under constant threat. In Israel, virtually everyone is affected. Many are at war or have children at war. Israel is being shelled



and hundreds of thousands had to flee from their homes near the Northern border. Many international fellows are staying away from institutes and campuses. And no end in sight.

What is also hard to endure: There are no simple answers. What Hamas did is horrible. What Hezbollah started is horrible. What people of Gaza and Lebanon face is horrible. On all sides, humans are suffering. What we urgently need now is a ceasefire and the return of all hostages.

In this difficult situation, what can we do to help?

First: We will remain a reliable partner for our Israeli colleagues, even if international colleagues are turning away from us, insulting us and threatening us. We must also make sure that our Jewish colleagues and Israeli co-workers are safe at our institutes, especially in times when geopolitical conflicts are carried into our organization and community.

Second, we are sending signs of hope. In November, we will open our office in Jerusalem. I am delighted that President Herzog plans to join us. In December, we will hold a symposium with our Israeli colleagues in Berlin. We are expanding the Minerva Foundation programs and our shared postdoc program. And we will continue to help by temporarily hosting researchers.

And third, we will work on strengthening the voice of reason in the Middle East. We oppose all boycotts of Israeli science, which are not only non-collegial, but also counterproductive. We will also keep our communication channels open to scientists in other countries in the region.

A colleague recently asked me how I want to achieve all of this. The answer is simple: We can only do this together. And if we stand united, we will succeed. This is also why today I wish to thank some of the key people involved in organizing our Israel collaborations: Marina Rodnina, who served as chair of the Minerva-Weizmann committee for 10 years, Maximilian Prugger for the administration, and Ulman Lindenberger, chair of our Israel Roundtable.

Dear friends from Israel,

That you have come to visit us at this time is proof of your trust and of our long-standing friendship. That should give us confidence. Although much is uncertain in these times, we know one thing for sure: We will continue to work together – and we will continue to conduct our science for the benefit of humanity.