



Education, Science and a Peaceful Future

Speech of the President of the Max Planck Society

Professor Dr. Patrick Cramer

At the Opening of the Max Planck Office in Israel

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Van Leer Institute, Jerusalem

– Check against delivery –

Mr. President, His Excellency Mr. Isaac Herzog,

First Lady, Mrs. Michal Herzog,

Ambassador, dear Steffen Seibert,

Dear Professor Lavi,

Dear colleagues,

One year has passed since our last visit to Israel. At the time, we had made plans to celebrate the successes of the Minerva Foundation and – more generally – the great scientific collaborations between Israel and Germany. But then came October 7 and the barbaric terrorist attack of Hamas. When we visited you a few weeks later, we experienced a country in shock. But we also saw uplifting solidarity between our scientists.

Now, one year later, we must admit: Our hope for a rapid de-escalation has not been fulfilled. Our hope that all hostages will be returned has not been fulfilled. And our hope that the life of our colleagues will be back to normal in due time has not been fulfilled. Instead, today, the war rages on and is now even fought on several fronts. Meanwhile, the question whether the means used in this war are adequate has shaken societies in Israel and around the world.

We all know that there is great suffering on all sides. We see people suffering all across the region. We see the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza. And we see that the war is claiming staggering numbers of civilian casualties. We feel with the families who are displaced, whose lives are disrupted and who are in constant danger. By now, we have arrived in a situation that is detrimental in many ways.



One thing has to worry us as a research organization: The war also endangers education and science, which are so important for the future.

Let us always remember: Science is not a luxury thing. No, on the contrary: Science is essential, in particular for states like Israel or Germany. It is essential to educate the next generation, to generate ideas and to foster innovation for health and economic strength. And science is essential to ensure that the voice of reason is preserved, that it remains loud and clear, so that it can be heard.

But Israeli science is under threat. Students and researchers have to leave campus and go to war. The international network of Israeli scientists is also endangered in many ways, because it has become more difficult to travel, to collaborate, and to attract international talent. And even worse: Israeli scientists face boycotts from many institutions. And Jewish scientists outside Israel are endangered by antisemitism in many countries. This is the situation and I have no simple solution to offer.

Esteemed guests, dear colleagues,

After October 7, we came here to tell you, our colleagues, that you are not alone in these difficult times. And we launched a program to strengthen our collaboration. As part of this, we are now opening our Israel office, here in Jerusalem. And yes, it is right to do so and there is no better time than now.

It is my pleasure to welcome Hila Elroy to the Max Planck Society. Many of you know her due to her work with the former president of Haifa University. Welcome, Hila, and thank you for taking on the challenge! We all wish you best of success! And we thank you, dear Professor Lavi, and your team, for hosting us here. It is perfectly right to settle at the Van Leer Institute, a place of excellent research, of open discourse, and with a stimulating program for young researchers.

So what do we want to achieve with our office? We want to facilitate our manifold research collaborations, and we wish to extend them to topics that are urgent global challenges, such as climate mitigation, public health, or the resilience of societies and democracies. But today we are here not only to open an office. No, we are also here to say once again: We stand with our Israeli colleagues. We are opposed to boycotts against our Israeli colleagues. And we will not tolerate antisemitism.

There is yet another message I wish to convey. For us, Israel belongs to the European Research Area. We need you and we want Israel to remain associated to the research and innovation framework programme of the EU.



Dear colleagues,

In times like these we can draw strength from remembering what has been achieved by those who were here before us, in the past. Let me remind us that it was scientists – mentors of the mentors of our mentors – who were the first to establish contacts between Israel and Germany after the Shoah. And let me remind us that it was our colleagues from the Weizmann Institute who invited my predecessor, Otto Hahn, to come here with a delegation in 1959, ten years before diplomatic relations were established! Although the world is a different place today, this can give us hope: That in such challenging times, science can build bridges. And that it can encourage political leaders to take on their responsibility and secure the basic conditions for our lives and work, for education and science, and for a bright and peaceful future.

Dear friends,

65 years after Hahn and colleagues first travelled to Israel, we come here again and wish to open the next chapter of our longstanding friendship. This may not be a day for big celebrations. But we don't need a ribbon cutting. We just need to be here with our friends. Thank you for joining and all the best.