

Statement in Support of Basma al-Sharif and Donatella Fioretti (Kunstakademie Düsseldorf)
March 17, 2026

The Association of Palestinian and Jewish Academics (PJA) expresses its unqualified support for the artist Basma al-Sharif and the Rector of the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Donatella Fioretti, who have both been the subjects of politically-motivated defamatory attacks over the past months.

PJA is a collective of Jewish and Palestinian scholars working in solidarity to foster an academic and social climate of respect, trust and mutual interest in our diverse and intersecting histories and cultures. We are particularly alarmed by the trend in Germany to distort, defame and silence speech by Palestinians and by those in solidarity with Palestine by leveling charges of antisemitism against them. Such actions are expressive of a weaponized discourse and entrenched in pervasive and systemic racism.

Palestinian artist Basma al-Sharif was invited to the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf to present and discuss her prize-winning work on January 21, 2026 in the context of Sparta, an independent, student-run space of exchange. In response, organizations including the Network of Jewish University Teachers (NJH) and the Werte Initiative, along with local politicians pressured Rector Fioretti to cancel the event, slanderously claiming that Basma al-Sharif was antisemitic and a glorifier of terrorism. By allowing the event to take place, Rector Fioretti upheld both academic freedom and the autonomy of the university. As a result, she has been under tremendous political pressure to resign, such that even the mayor of Düsseldorf signed on to a petition calling for her dismissal.

The claims against Basma al-Sharif were based on a partial and decontextualized reading of select social media posts. Public denunciation of artists and scholars based on bad faith readings of social media activity has sadly become typical of attempts to silence voices opposed to the approved German political narrative. The result is an obsessive pattern of pressure campaigns against academic and cultural institutions that host scholars, artists and others, including Jewish persons, who dare to discuss the realities of occupation, ethnic cleansing and genocide in Palestine. Antisemitism commissioners and organizations, like the NJH, do not speak for all Jewish persons or groups. Unfortunately, they wield the anxieties and fears of some Jews as a tool to silence the voices of Palestinians and other Jews. Such initiatives have the perverse effect of proliferating fear and essentializing Jewishness, thus fostering the antisemitism their actions claim to oppose. Politicians calling for Rector Fioretti's resignation are also treading dangerous ground, blurring the constitutional boundary that protects academic freedom and institutional self-governance, and opening the door to political oversight of scholarship that liberal democracies are designed to prevent.

The Association of Palestinian and Jewish Academics expresses its appreciation for Donatella Fioretti's principled stance for academic and artistic freedom. We also reaffirm our support for Basma al-Sharif and all others subject to dehumanizing rhetoric and defamatory campaigns fueled by the anti-Palestinian racism of German politics, culture and society. We join the [Hochschulrektorenkonferenz](#) (German Rector's Conference) and the more than thousand scholars and cultural figures who have issued an [open letter](#) warning against political interference in academic autonomy and the freedom of art and scholarship in Germany.