



THE
NORWEGIAN
ASSOCIATION
OF
CURATORS

Open letter from The Norwegian Association of Curators to the art community in Norway, Sápmi, and abroad against genocidal acts in Palestine^A as death toll in Gaza has crossed the 8,000-mark, including a record number of children killed.¹

¹ (30.10.2023) CNN World, "Gaza death toll nears 8,000, Palestinian Health Ministry says". URL: https://edition.cnn.com/middle-east/live-news/israel-hamas-war-gaza-news-10-30-23/h_647d02c9e96a737aead7f2ae5a467e75

² (23.10.2023) UN Sustainable Development Group, "Gaza death toll passes 5,000 with no ceasefire in sight". URL: <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/gaza-death-toll-passes-5000-no-ceasefire-sight>

³ (24.10.2023) United Nations, "Amid Increasingly Dire Humanitarian Situation in Gaza, Secretary-General Tells Security Council Hamas Attacks Cannot Justify Collective Punishment of Palestinian People". URL: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/sc15462.doc.htm>

⁴ (24.10.2023) United Nations, "Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council – on the Middle East [as delivered]". URL: <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2023-10-24/secretary-generals-remarks-the-security-council-the-middle-east-delivered>

⁵ (30.10.2023) Nathalie Tocci, "Europe's chaotic response to the Israel-Hamas war reveals how weak it is – to its enemies' delight". URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/oct/30/europe-war-middle-east-conflict-israel-eu>

⁶ (23.10.2023) Mariann Enge, "On Genocide and the Duty to Speak Up". URL: <https://kunstkritikk.com/on-genocide-and-the-duty-to-speak-up/>

We stand in Solidarity with all civilians violated by the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict; we support the Palestinian fight against colonialism, apartheid, and ethnic cleansing, and we distance ourselves from all forms of islamophobia and antisemitism. We condemn the October 7th act of terror by Hamas including the ongoing hostage situation, and the ongoing war crimes being perpetrated against civilians in Palestine. We call for an immediate stop to the violence; a full release of hostages, the restoration of humanitarian supplies of food, water, and medicine in Gaza; resumption in supply of fuel and electricity; the safeguarding of medical services along with safe passage for those seeking refuge and medical attention.

On October 23rd, the United Nations (UN) announced that the "Gaza death toll passes 5,000 with no ceasefire in sight"² and announced the day after that Gaza "remains under a full electricity blackout and hospitals are on the brink of collapse"³ with the UN Secretary-General António Guterres stating that "nothing can justify the deliberate killing, injuring and kidnapping of civilians"⁴. After weeks of violence, we are appalled that political leaders^B have not named the actions as war crimes.

On October 30th, Guardian columnist Nathalie Tocci reflected on how fractures in Europe are fuelling the conflict: "The tragic events in the region since 7 October have brutally exposed Europe's contradictions. [...] When it has looked as if Europe's approach was hitting rock bottom, the EU has continued digging. Heads of government argued over whether to call for a humanitarian pause in the bombardment of Gaza or a ceasefire, eventually converging on the far weaker former formulation. But the ink was barely dry on that agreement in the European Council when the 27 EU countries split threefold at the United Nations general assembly, with eight voting in favour, 15 abstaining and four voting against a Jordanian resolution calling for a truce and the respect for international humanitarian law. [...] The crumbling of European unity over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict may ultimately be a footnote in the long history of diplomatic failures on this tragedy. But it should be more. It was the European Community that, back in 1980, first recognised the legitimate self-determination rights of the Palestinian people."⁵

As Kunstkritikk art critic Mariann Enge writes, "When Western leaders fail to condemn Israel's bombing of civilian Palestinians in Gaza, it becomes the people's responsibility – and the responsibility of artists and cultural workers – to protest. [...] We all have a responsibility to react and protest against violations of international law and war crimes."⁶

We acknowledge and admire the work that individuals and art institutions have been doing in support of the Palestinian community and the civilians taken as hostages by Hamas militants, and their attempts to actively condemn human rights violations. We also support the Open Letter from students at the Oslo National Academy of The Arts (KHiO), demanding the Norwegian government and the international community to distance itself from the hypocrisy and double standard of Western nations, and pressure on Israel and its allies to end the violence in occupied Palestinian territories.

Humans have a universal need for all forms of expression, profoundly mirroring and impacting the development of our societies. Art and culture remain as spaces of reflection, community building, and repair, and enables us to communicate, challenge

and share experiences of what it means to be human in this world together today and beyond. Art is a force that shapes, influences, and reflects society, and we cannot stress enough its pivotal role in the processes of recovery and reconciliation.

As places of social engagement and public debate, we encourage art institutions in Norway, of all sizes, to use their public voice to call for action by the Norwegian Government and any other structure withholding the power to help to demand the release of hostages and an immediate ceasefire and cessation of violence in Gaza as well as in the occupied Palestinian territories in the West Bank.

The Norwegian Association of Curators believes there is no time to be neutral when crimes against humanity are taking place. We demand governmental, institutional, and academic silence to be broken – one cannot stay silent while witnessing genocidal acts.^A As cultural workers developing content for and in collaboration with art institutions, we encourage them, in this dire moment, to act based on the values and narratives they advocate for and aim to represent in our societies.

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^A This open letter has been in process since Wednesday 25th of October 2023. In the first paragraph, it originally read: “against the Palestinian genocide”. In the last paragraph, it originally read: “one cannot stay silent while witnessing genocide”. The wording change to “genocidal acts” in both paragraphs was made following a conversation with members of the Association about the use and etymology of the word genocide: “The term genocide was coined in 1943 by the Jewish-Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin [after witnessing the horrors of the Holocaust], who combined the Greek word ‘genos’ (race or tribe) with the Latin word ‘cide’ (to kill). [...] Dr Lemkin campaigned to have genocide recognised as a crime under international law. His efforts gave way to the adoption of the United Nations Genocide Convention in December 1948, which came into effect in January 1951.” For more information about this wording, please read the article “How do you define genocide?” (BBC News, 4.4.2022). URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-11108059>

^B This open letter has been in process since Wednesday 25th of October 2023. It originally read “Norwegian political leaders” instead of “political leaders”. The word “Norwegian” was removed after a conversation with members of the board, following the UN General Assembly vote on 27.10.2023, adopting the resolution on “protection of civilians and upholding legal and humanitarian obligations” on the ongoing Gaza crisis, to which Norway voted in favour. Norway was the only Nordic country voting in favour of the resolution – Denmark, Finland, Iceland, and Sweden abstained to the vote. For more information, read the UN News “Gaza crisis: General Assembly adopts resolution calling for ‘humanitarian truce’, civilian protection” (27.10.2023). URL: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/10/1142932>