



Summary

- Palestinian activist Mazin Qumsyieh was invited by the Palestine Student Association to give a lecture at the University of Zurich.
- The event was sponsored by the Student Association of the University of Zurich, and University Rector Michael Schaepman had given his approval for the lecture.
- Qumsyieh is known for his anti-Israel and anti-Semitic statements and misinformation.
- His appearance at the University of Zurich was also interspersed with this.
- FokusIsrael.ch and 19 members of the Zurich Cantonal Council had warned University Rector Michael Schaepman against providing Qumsyieh with space for his defamatory hate propaganda.
- Schaepman refused to make a personal statement both before and after the appearance.
- Schaepman is now suspected of having violated Article ^{261bis} of the Swiss Criminal Code (anti-racism penal provision) through his behavior.
- So says Marcel Niggli, Professor of Criminal Law at the University of Fribourg and an expert on issues relating to discrimination and anti-Semitism.
- The whole thing will also have political repercussions for University Rector Schaepman.



Anti-Semitism: Rector of the University of Zurich under criminal suspicion

Mazin Qumsyieh is a biology professor at two universities in the West Bank, which is administered by the Palestinian Authority. He uses his title to promote Palestinian hate propaganda against the Jewish state of Israel under the guise of supposedly scientific topics.

This was also the case at the University of Zurich on Monday, May 4. Qumsyieh was invited by the Palestine Student Association to give a lecture with the telling title “Ecology under Occupation” with the blessing of university rector Michael Schaepman.

However, the topic of ecology only played a subordinate role in Qumsyieh’s lecture and the subsequent discussion. Instead, the Palestinian activist, who was connected via video link, used the platform offered to him at the University of Zurich for his hate messages directed against Israel.

Qumsyieh was not too particular about the truth.

- He accused Israel of “ethnic cleansing” during the 1948 War of Independence. This had been sparked by the Arab states, and Mohammed Amin al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, had called on the Arab population to leave their homes at the beginning of the war.
- He then accused Israel of genocide in the war in Gaza caused by Hamas. This accusation is also of a purely political-propagandistic nature, and renowned military and international law experts have rejected it as unjustified.
- In order to justify the claim to the territory of Israel, the West Bank and Gaza, Qumsyieh claimed that this area was already populated by Palestinians “thousands of years ago”. This is historically proven to be untrue.
- He accused Israel of carpet bombing during the Gaza war. And he



said that Israel's air force had flown over 1.5 million missions during the two-year war. Both are also provable lies: there was no "carpet bombing" against the civilian population in Gaza, and the Israeli air force did not even fly a tenth of the missions claimed by Qumsyieh.

- The Palestinian biology professor compared the war in Lebanon, which is due to the constant rocket attacks on Israel by the local terrorist organization Hezbollah, to the Vietnam War. He claimed that Israel's use of white phosphorus to mark military targets – which is permitted under international law – was the same as the defoliation of the Vietnamese jungle by the Americans' use of Agent Orange. A completely misplaced comparison.
- Qumsyieh also said that Israel had occupied 50 percent of Lebanon. The fact is that the protection zone set up by the Israeli army in the south of the country to protect it from Hezbollah rocket attacks only covers 10% of Lebanese territory.
- In addition, the Palestinian professor falsified the figures used by the World Health Organization (WHO) for the minimum daily consumption of water in order to accuse Israel of not providing enough water to the population in the West Bank. A claim that is also not true based on the correct WHO figures.
- And last but not least, he accused Israel of subjecting the Palestinian population in the West Bank to an apartheid regime and keeping them in ghettos and concentration camps.



Anti-Semitism: Rector of the University of Zurich under criminal suspicion

A total of at least 16 untrue and misleading claims by Qumsyieh had a single aim: to defame and demonize the Jewish state of Israel. This had nothing to do with a biology lecture.

University Rector Michael Schaepman remains silent

When asked about this, University Rector Michael Schaepman, who had given his permission for the “lecture” with Mazin Qumsyieh, refused to respond. Instead, a department called “CampusKultur” sent an anonymous reply email in faulty German. It reads: “We ask for your understanding that UZH is unable to respond in detail to individual statements provided via transcript. However, your comments will be incorporated into our internal reflection on how controversial events at UZH can be better prepared, accompanied and framed.”

“Campuskultur” had already responded in a similarly meaningless and anonymous manner in two emails to FokusIsrael.ch and 19 members of the Zurich cantonal parliament before the event. FokusIsrael.ch had given Rector Schaepman a detailed insight into Qumsyieh’s activist background and anti-Israel and anti-Semitic statements in an email. The 19 cantonal councillors from various political parties also sent an email to the rector asking him to cancel the Palestine Student Association event.

“How can it be that you or UZH allow Mazin Qumsiyeh to perform in your lecture hall against this background? In our view, this is incompatible with the values of UZH,” the parliamentarians wrote in their email. “Particularly in times when anti-Jewish attacks have presumably increased and Jews no longer feel safe, we expect you and UZH to be more sensitive. We kindly ask you to return to your decision. We owe this to our Jewish fellow citizens.”

In both cases, the Rector remained silent and had “CampusKultur” reply in his place. The anonymous email in question stated that the organizers had been asked to adhere to the University of Zurich’s Code of Conduct. “Discrimination of any kind, hate speech, bullying, sexual harassment, abuse of power, manipulation, violence and threats have no place at UZH.”

“Article 261bis of the Criminal Code probably fulfilled”

It is questionable whether University Rector Schaepman, who is unpopular internally due to his often quick-tempered and foul-mouthed manner towards staff, will be



Anti-Semitism: Rector of the University of Zurich under criminal suspicion

able to avoid answering questions in the future. Marcel Niggli, Professor of Criminal Law at the University of Fribourg and a specialist in discrimination and anti-Semitism issues, judges after reviewing the verbatim transcript of the event with Mazin Qumsyieh: “I am of the opinion that this probably fulfills Art. ^{261bis} StGB.”. This refers to the so-called “anti-racism criminal provision”, which criminalizes discrimination and incitement to hatred.

According to Professor Niggli, this is exactly what happened at the event at the University of Zurich. “The whole tenor of the lecture is directed against Jews and Israel, which is already evident in the title: Ecology under occupation.” Israel is falsely described as a colonizer – as is often the case in current anti-Semitism, criticizes Niggli.

In addition, according to the Fribourg criminal law professor, the use of sensational terms such as “ecocide” (ecocide in analogy to genocide). This is also pure agitation. Just as it is pure agitation to describe the Israeli military as the largest producer of greenhouse gases. “In short, the lecture does not strike me as scientific, but as political propaganda. In terms of criminal law, this propaganda probably qualifies as incitement to hatred (Art. ^{261bis}, para. 1 StGB).”

This assessment does not only concern Mazin Qumsyieh, who made the relevant statements. It is also relevant for the Palestine Student Association and the Association of Students at the University of Zurich, which organized the event, as well as for University Rector Michael Schaepman, who approved it.

“If I look at what the speaker had already said beforehand and consider that the rectorate was informed, it should have been present at the event and, if necessary, interrupted it to correct the situation or then stopped it,” writes criminal law professor Niggli in his assessment.

In conclusion, Niggli states: “The knowledge of the content of the lecture – a title such as “Ecology Under Occupation” indicates to any thinking person what is going to happen – makes a qualification as a propaganda action within the meaning of Art. ^{261bis} para. 3 SCC appear at least possible, if not obvious. According to this, not only the organization, but also the promotion of and participation in such actions is punishable.” So also Rector Michael Schaepman.

Political repercussions too



Anti-Semitism: Rector of the University of Zurich under criminal suspicion

The university rector's behavior will also have repercussions for him at a political level. FDP cantonal councillor Linda Camenisch will not tolerate the way he behaved in connection with Mazin Qumsyieh's lecture. She will therefore be submitting a question on the subject to the cantonal parliament.

Camenisch is known for not letting up, but getting to the bottom of things. It is largely thanks to her that the scandal at the heart clinic at Zurich University Hospital was not swept under the carpet but dealt with politically.

^[1] ^[i] Sacha Wigdorovits is President of the Focus Israel and Middle East Association, which runs the website www.fokusisrael.chbetreibt. He studied history, German and social psychology at the University of Zurich and worked as a US correspondent for the SonntagsZeitung, was editor-in-chief of BLICK and co-founder of the commuter newspaper 20minuten.