Hannah Einhaus appeals to the City Council and the government of the City of Bern

Dear Members of the Bern City Council and Municipal Council

“Anyone who tolerates hatred and incitement is a gravedigger of democracy.”
I would like to remind you of this quote from the Bernese attorney Georges Brunschvig on the third anniversary of October 7, four days before the next violent demonstration titled “We’re coming back to tear down Zionism” (see image). I am writing to you as a resident of Bern, as a Swiss citizen, as a woman, and as a Jew.

Messages of hate, symbols of violence, and death threats against Jews (“Zionists”) stare me in the face every day on the walls of Bern. For 1,097 days now. They have changed my life in Bern. Not because of Netanyahu and the Israeli army. Nor because of the criticism directed at them. Red Hamas triangles and slogans like “Kill your local Zionists,” “Death to the IDF,” or “We will tear down Zionism” are not criticism. They call for the destruction of the only Jewish state. In doing so, they deny Jews worldwide the right to a life of self-determination. Including me, here in Bern.

Jewish self-determination can mean national sovereignty, embodied by the State of Israel. But for me, as a Jewish woman living in Bern, self-determination also means openly expressing my identity. “Death to Zionism” tells me: Only by denying my Jewish identity, only by rejecting Israel’s existence, can I be a good Jew. In short: Only an invisible—or dead—Jew is a good Jew.
Bern has had a Jewish community since 1848. Since 1871, Jewish citizens in Switzerland have had the same rights and obligations as other citizens. Yet a Star of David on a necklace, a kippah on one’s head, and even a conversation in Hebrew have become risk factors in everyday life in Bern for nearly 1,100 days now. A key reason for this is that authorities turn a blind eye to anti-Semitism (“hatred of Zionists”) in Bern. A death threat is tolerated as mere opinion.

When I organize an event on a Jewish topic—as I did recently in Progr—(www.tayelet70.ch), I need private security because public spaces tolerate this hatred. A large portion of my meager cultural budget (which doesn’t include public funds!) goes toward security costs.
– Because this city turns a blind eye when it comes to Jews (“Zionists”).
– Because in this city, it’s okay for a mob wearing keffiyehs to gather in the Progrhof, attack a peaceful demonstration against anti-Semitism, and then tag individual police officers with red triangles on Instagram.
– Because in this city, it’s possible to throw stones and still be released after being arrested if the person arrested happens to have the right connections in the judicial

system.
– Because an organization at Bollwerk 39/41 can invite the European coordinator of Samidoun—an organization with ties to the PFLP—who celebrates October 7 as a triumph of the “resistance.”
– Because nearly 30 “Apartheid-Free Zones” in Bern claim to be doing something good by keeping Jews (“Zionists”) out. That is postcolonial nonsense.

Because Bern lacks the political backbone to ensure a safe city for everyone.

I would like to thank everyone who has shown backbone over the past three years. Unfortunately, they have remained a small minority in this council chamber so far. However, standing up against hate and violence requires a clear and broadly supported stance—from each and every one of you.

I expect ALL of you, as democratically elected politicians, to take your responsibility for public safety seriously.
This applies to this coming Sunday as well as to the other 364 days of the year.

You can criticize the “state” or “capital” here and everywhere.
But throwing stones at police officers—who represent the state—as scapegoats is unacceptable.
Stand with those who protect our public safety, including this coming Sunday.
And do not tolerate a situation where perpetrators are released based on who they know when violent crimes are committed.

One can criticize the State of Israel, its occupation policies, and the war in Gaza. But it is unacceptable to single out the Jews (using the slur “Zionists”) in Bern as scapegoats and shower them with hate speech and calls for violence.

Public safety applies to everyone.
It is unacceptable to have to endure hatred and violence because Bern’s politicians are turning a blind eye.
As a Jewish woman in Bern, I am not willing to hide my identity.
It is unacceptable to have to privately cover security costs for cultural events in Bern simply because postcolonial nonsense (“resistance”) is currently “in” and widely tolerated.

Since I sent you that email a year ago, the hatred in Bern has, unfortunately, continued to spread and has even taken root in 30 locations (Apartheid-Free Zones).

Hannah Einhaus appeals to the City Council and the government of the City of Bern

The “resistance” against “Zios” is directed against a mix of “Netanyahu” and local authorities…

Hate doesn’t start with the violent Black Bloc.
Hate starts in people’s minds. So does the stance against it.
As elected officials, take a stand against hate. You owe it to your constituents.

Foster a climate of inclusion and diversity that embraces Jewish people (derogatory term: “Zionists”), their daily lives, their identity, and their cultural life. Not just for the sake of Jewish people, but for the sake of the safety and integrity of EVERYONE.

If you, as elected politicians, are serious about democracy and the rule of law, do not turn a blind eye to calls for hatred and violence against certain groups (currently: Jews, also known as “Zionists” and “cops”). Otherwise, you could end up digging a grave for our democracy—and thus for yourselves—in the long run.

Best regards

Dr. Hannah Einhaus
Historian, journalist, cultural event organizer