

Open letter against the presentation of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Human Rights Award to Women's March USA

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) plans to present its Human Rights Award to the Women's March USA on 12 November. The award is ought to honor the "commitment to a strong, active and inclusive civil society."¹ We believe that the Women's March USA does not meet the criteria of this award, as its organizers have repeatedly attracted attention through antisemitic statements², the trivialization of antisemitism and the exclusion of Zionists* and Jews* since Women's March USA establishment in 2017. Women's March USA does not constitute an inclusive alliance.

We, scholarship holders and alumni of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, call on the FES

- 1. to distance themselves from the Women's March USA and to revoke the award immediately**
- 2. to adopt the antisemitism definition of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance**
- 3. to check future projects, award recipients and any activities concerning antisemitism – with the help of experts* in this field**
- 4. to oppose any form of antisemitism both within the FES and externally.**

At this point we would like to clarify how antisemitism is defined. The working definition of antisemitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), which is also supported by the Federal Government of Germany, reads as follows: "Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities."³ According to the IHRA, antisemitism accuses Jews* of conspiring to harm humanity and is used to blame Jews* for "why things go wrong".⁴ Antisemitism can be expressed in language, writing, images, as well as actions and employs stereotypes and negative traits. Antisemitism can also take the form of so-called new, Israel-related antisemitism. This includes hostility against the State of Israel, which is then described as a Jewish collective.⁵

Since its inception in 2017, Women's March USA has attracted media attention due to the antisemitism of its board members and chair women. Linda Sarsour, a member of the board and former president of Women's March USA, is notorious for her propagation of antisemitism towards Israel. This transpired not only through her statement from March 2017 claiming that feminists* could not be Zionists* simultaneously⁶ and that Zionists* were Nazis,⁷ but also through her demonization and delegitimization of Israel, as well as the application of a double standard. She also calls herself a "very staunch supporter of the BDS movement."⁸ These forms of antisemitism were also visible at the Berlin Women's March in January 2018. The organizers* did not show any attempt of critique or dissociation.⁹

In the wake of emerging criticism due to antisemitic comments, Women's March USA issued a press release in early March 2018, after which, however, nothing changed in regard to antisemitic statements of the individuals involved. Sarsour, for example, described Israel as an apartheid state ("This is apartheid happening in Palestine, funded by our taxpayers", June

2018).¹⁰ She also spreads antisemitic conspiracy theories that resemble the classic antisemitic trope of blood libel. In September 2018, for instance, she claimed that when US police officers shoot unarmed black people, Jewish persons responsible would lurk in the background.¹¹

Linda Sarsour, Carmen Perez (another board member of Women's March USA), and Tamika D. Mallory (co-chairwoman of Women's March USA who is to receive the FES Human Rights Award), have attracted attention due to their long-standing support of the notorious antisemite Louis Farrakhan,¹² who, among other things, called Adolf Hitler a "very great man"¹³ while recently compared Jews* to termites.¹⁴ Even after Mallory was repeatedly asked to distance herself from Farrakhan's antisemitic and transphobic statements in March of this year, she refused to do so.¹⁵ Farrakhan blames the oppression of blacks on Jewish "bloodsuckers"¹⁶ and states "the powerful Jews are my enemy".¹⁷ This antisemitic conspiracy theory also explains Mallory's statements against anti-discrimination trainings by the Anti-Defamation League at Starbucks. In April 2018 she claimed that the ADL would be "constantly attacking black and brown people."¹⁸ Mallory also spreads Israel-related antisemitism by demonizing and delegitimizing Israel as the Jewish collective. She simplifies and distorts historical events surrounding the founding of the State of Israel and presents Jews* as aggressors who "kill, steal and do whatever it is you're gonna do to take that land [Israel]"¹⁹ (June 2018). In solidarity with A Day Without a Woman, a strike was organised by Women's March USA on 8 March 2017. The organizers of this strike also included Palestinian terrorist Rasmia Yousef Odeh.²⁰ The positive reference to Odeh by Linda Sarsour and the Women's March USA in general further illustrates this one-sided, anti-Israeli attitude. These examples are merely a sample of antisemitic statements by members of the Women's March USA. In addition, there were misogyny statements such as those by Linda Sarsour, who wrote in a tweet, addressing among others Ayaan Hirsi Ali (who became a victim of genital mutilation as a girl in Somalia): "I wish I could take their vaginas away – they don't deserve to be women." This tweet was later deleted by Sarsour after facing criticism.²¹

The press release of Women's March USA, cited as evidence by the FES that Women's March USA distances itself from antisemitism, however, shows an understanding of antisemitism lacking in complexity. The statement creates the impression as if antisemitism has to be endured until there is progress in other social struggles. At the same time the authors only refer to one antisemitic incident while omitting the majority of them.²² More concerning still, further occurrences of antisemitism emerged after the press release in March 2018, as illustrated by many of the above mentioned examples. Recent statements by Carmen Perez, among others, reveal that criticism of their affinity to Farrakhan was not taken as a cause for contemplation or disassociation from Farrakhan and therefore for moral condemnation of antisemitism.²³ Even after the antisemitic act of terror on October 27 in Pittsburgh, which saw 11 Jews* murdered, antisemitism was only attributed to white supremacists, while antisemitism among supporters and members of Women's March USA was still ignored and not dealt with.²⁴

Just as important the struggle for feminism still is, so is the fight against other forms of discrimination, as well as to work inclusively and to not exclude Jews*. Some activists in the US felt the same way and therefore established *WoMen4All* (*WMFA* – <https://women4all.org/mission/>), an organization which also champions feminism and other human rights through protests,²⁵ while still taking an authentic stance against antisemitism.²⁶

Thus, with WMFA there would have been an alternative recipient to honor the current feminist movement in the US as such.

An organization that may support feminism, but discriminates against Jews* and Zionists* and denies Israel's right to exist should not be honored by a democratic foundation that advocates diversity and speaks out against discrimination.

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¹ <https://www.fes.de/menschenrechtspreis>

² We adopt this spelling (i.e. "antisemitism" instead of "anti-Semitism") from the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA); see further <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/index.php/spelling-antisemitism>

³ For further explanations and examples, see: <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/node/196> <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/themen/kulturdiallog/06-interkulturelledialog/-/216610>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ A guidance to capture Israel-related antisemitism comes in the form of the 3D test of antisemitism: delegitimization, demonization and double standards. This is the case, if Israel as a state is delegitimized and demonized. A double standard may be present, if actions by the Israeli government or by the Israeli people is judged differently as those by other countries or agents. For a discussion on the differentiation between antisemitism and legitimate criticism, see: Salzborn, Samuel, „Israelkritik oder Antisemitismus? Kriterien für eine Unterscheidung“, *Kirche und Israel. Neukirchener Theologische Zeitschrift* 28:1, 2013, S. 5-16. http://www.salzborn.de/txt/2013_Kirche-und-Israel.pdf

⁶ See the interview: <https://www.thenation.com/article/can-you-be-a-zionist-feminist-linda-sarsour-says-no/>

⁷ <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/234702>

⁸ The antisemitic movement BDS ("Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions") calls for a boycott against Israel and repeatedly questions Israel's right to exist.

<https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-at-anti-semitism-panel-linda-sarsour-speaks-her-mind-1.5627181;>

⁹ <https://fda.de/blog/2018/01/22/israelgegnerinnen-instrumentalisieren-womens-march-2018-in-berlin/>

¹⁰ <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-mallory-you-don-t-show-up-to-somebody-s-home-and-throw-them-out-1.6137993> [21.10.2018]; see for example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYfAGgX5p04>

¹¹ Linda Sarsour, ISNA Convention, September 2018: <https://www.algemeiner.com/2018/09/26/linda-sarsours-blood-libel/>; <https://www.mena-watch.com/linda-sarsour-juden-sind-schuld-an-polizeigewalt-in-den-usa/>

¹² See for example: <https://www.heyalma.com/everything-need-know-anti-semitism-womens-march-movement/>

¹³ <https://www.ajc.com/news/national/who-louis-farrakhan-things-know-about-the-nation-islam-leader-black-activist/1zUaxjihBLiqOKso5h262H/>

¹⁴ <https://www.jta.org/2018/10/21/news-opinion/farrakhan-termites-video-removed-facebook>

¹⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/03/womens-march/555122/>

<http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2018/03/is-it-so-hard-to-denounce-louis-farrakhans-anti-semitism.html>

¹⁶ Ibid. and further:

Juliane Wetzel: Farrakhan, Louis (Haleem Abdul) [geboren als Louis Eugene Walcott]. In: Wolfgang Benz (Hrsg.): *Handbuch des Antisemitismus. Bd. 2: Personen*. De Gruyter Saur, Berlin 2009, p. 221.

¹⁷ <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/3/7/17082030/womens-march-louis-farrakhan-tamika-mallory-anti-semitism-controversy>

¹⁸ <https://www.jta.org/2018/04/18/news-opinion/womens-march-leader-tamika-mallory-attacks-starbucks-including-adl-bias-adviser>

¹⁹ <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/.premium-mallory-you-don-t-show-up-to-somebody-s-home-and-throw-them-out-1.6137993>

²⁰ <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/mar/24/rasmea-odeh-convicted-terrorist-agrees-leave-us-ex/>

"Odeh was convicted in 1969 for a bomb attack on a supermarket in Israel. One Friday evening, an explosive device disguised as a coffee can detonated, killing two students and injuring nine other customers. A second bomb could be defused. Even though her defenders at the time claimed that Odeh's confession was forced under torture, she never denied her involvement in the attack itself. After ten years in custody, she was released by the Palestinian People's Liberation Front as part of an exchange of prisoners." Translated from: <https://jungle.world/artikel/2017/31/doppeldeutige-botschaften>

²¹ <https://twitter.com/shireenqudos/status/824762593940164608>

²² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Bv-w3mu-t-FL17IOynGiO_qvygADUi/view

²³ <https://twitter.com/msladyjustice1/status/1053017121058258944>

²⁴ <https://www.dailywire.com/news/37723/womens-march-holds-vigil-oppose-anti-semitism-%E2%80%93-emily-zanotti>

²⁵ <https://women4all.org/sistermarches/>

²⁶ "How the New 'WoMen for All' is Fighting Anti Semitism and So Much More": https://www.theinsidepress.com/how-the-new-women-for-all-is-fighting-anti-semitism-and-so-much-more/?fbclid=IwAR0c0G5MhcgTzBC1xlve82q2KSP-lqtXc5N4D3IRh9tkXwTSSyd_PC5LGc