

Daniel Barenboim in the SZ

Our message of peace must be louder than ever

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"The willingness to empathize is essential": Daniel Barenboim, here in Aix-en-Provence in 2021.

(Photo: CHRISTOPHE SIMON/AFP)

After the barbaric terror of Hamas and on the occasion of the war in the Middle East, it may sound naive, but it is not: Right now we all have to see the human being in the other.

Guest contribution by Daniel Barenboim

The current events in Israel and Gaza have deeply shaken us all. There is nothing to justify Hamas' barbaric, terrorist acts towards civilians, including children and babies. We have to leave it that way and stop.

Then, of course, the next step is the question: What now? Do we now surrender to this terrible violence and let our pursuit of peace "death" - or do we continue to insist that there must and can be peace?

Many of our musicians live in the region, they are directly affected

I am convinced that we must continue and keep an eye on the larger context of the conflict. Our musicians of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, our students in the Barenboim-Said Academy, they are almost all directly affected. Many of the musicians live in the region, and the others also have many connections to their homeland. This reinforces my conviction that there can only be a solution to this conflict: based on humanism, justice and equality - and without gun violence and occupation.

Our message of peace must be louder than ever. The greatest danger is that all the

people who so long for peace will be drowned out by extremists and violence. However, any analysis, any moral equation that we possibly set up must have this basic understanding as a basis: There are people on both sides. Humanity is universal, and the recognition of this truth on both side is the only way. The suffering of innocent people on any side is absolutely unbearable.

We can change on a small scale. On a large scale, politics is in demand

The images of the devastating terrorist attacks of Hamas break our hearts. Our reaction clearly shows: The willingness to empathy, the willingness to feel the situation of others, is essential. Of course, and right now you also have to allow fears, despair and anger - but at the moment when this leads to us deny humanity, we are lost. Every single person can make a difference and pass on. This is how we change on a small scale. On a large scale, politics is in demand.

We must offer other perspectives to those who are attracted to extremism. Usually it is completely perspectiveless, desperate people who write themselves murderous or extremist ideologies, find a home there. Education and information are also essential, because there are so many positions based on absolute misinformation.

The cruel climax was the Nazis, who murdered six million Jews

To repeat it very clearly: The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not a political conflict, between two states over borders, water, oil or other resources. It is a deeply human conflict between two peoples who know suffering and persecution. The persecution of the Jewish people over 20 centuries found its cruel climax in the ideology of the Nazis, who murdered six million Jews. The Jewish people had a dream; their own country, a home for all Jews in today's area of Palestine. From this dream, however, followed a deeply problematic, because fundamentally wrong assumption: A country without a people for a people without a country. In reality, however, the proportion of the Jewish population of Palestine in the First World War was only nine percent. 91 percent of the population was therefore not Jewish, but Palestinian, grown over centuries. The country can hardly be called a "country without people" and the Palestinian population saw no reason to give up their own country. The conflict was thus inevitable, and since its beginning, the fronts have only hardened over generations. I am convinced: The Israelis will have security when the Palestinians can feel hope, i.e. justice. Both sides must recognize their enemies as people and try to empathize with their point of view, their pain and their need.

Israelis must also accept that the occupation of Palestine is incompatible with this.

For my understanding of this over 70-year-old conflict, my friendship with Edward Said is the key experience. We have found a place in each other that can take us further and can help us to see the supposedly other more clearly and to understand better. We have recognized and found each other in our common humanity. For me, our joint work with the West-Eastern

Divan Orchestra, which finds its logical continuation and perhaps even its climax in the Barenboim-Said Academy, is probably the most important activity of my life.

Is it little when Arab and Israeli musicians share a desk?

In the current situation, we naturally wonder about the importance of our joint work in orchestra and academy. It may seem little - but the mere fact that Arab and Israeli musicians share a desk at every concert and make music together is of immense value to us. Over the years, through this commonality of making music, but also through our countless, sometimes heated discussions, we have learned to understand the supposedly other better, to approach him and to find common ground in our humanity and in music. We begin and end all controversial discussions with the basic understanding that we are all equal people who deserve peace, freedom and happiness.

This may sound naive, but it is not: Because it is this understanding that seems completely lost in the conflict on both sides today.

Our experience shows that this message has reached many people in the region and around the world. We must, want and will continue to believe that music can bring us closer to each other in our humanity.

Daniel Barenboim, born in Buenos Aires in 1942, was - until his resignation for health reasons in January of this year - artistic director and general music director of the Berlin State Opera Unter den Linden for more than 30 years. SZ critic Joachim Kaiser called him "the last genius of classical music." He has both Israeli and Palestinian nationality. Barenboim founded the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra in 1999, half of which is composed of Arab and Israeli musicians. Barenboim received fierce criticism and recognition from both sides for his commitment.