

Dear Journalists, Broadcasters and Representatives of the Press in Germany,

First of all I would like to thank many of you for your work during the past year. Your efforts as journalists raise awareness of Palestine in Germany and contribute significantly towards shaping public opinion. Your articles, interviews and other contributions remind us of Germany's interest in Palestine, for which we are grateful.

In this letter, I would like to address a few issues concerning reporting on Palestine, and highlight areas where extra care should be taken. These observations are based on what we have seen in recent reports and broadcasts. This will help to ensure that people do not feel misled or misinformed, thereby also protecting the professionalism and integrity of the German media, as foreseen by the German "Pressekodex".

1. When it comes to a subject like the Palestine Israel question, there are naturally elements that are controversial. We understand this. But there are also some accepted facts, and here I name only a few of the most relevant, by way of illustration. Bethlehem is in Palestine (whether you choose to refer to it as Palestine or the Occupied Palestinian Territories). Hebron is in Palestine. East Jerusalem is in Palestine. The occupation is a reality. Settlements are illegal.

These are matters of international law that are accepted by every country in the world except the State of Israel. As such, they should be clearly stated as facts. To say that the Israeli government disputes these things is not incorrect, but to imply that there are two equally weighted opinions on such issues, or to suggest that they are generally controversial topics, is misleading.

2. In our specific situation, context is incredibly important. This is largely due to a significant power imbalance between the two parties: on the one side Israel, as a military power, and on the other side Palestine, being neither sovereign nor independent, with little to no control over its territory or people. This reality is a fact.

If the context is omitted, it makes it almost impossible to draw logical conclusions. An understanding of the context is vital if we are to reach a just and fair solution for Palestinians and Israelis alike.

3. When dealing with killings, presumption of innocence applies also to the press (Section 13 of the Pressekodex). There have been a many cases in recent months where Palestinians have been shot dead after allegedly attacking Israelis. In a number of cases there has been no immediate proof of an attack, aside from hearsay, and the circumstances of the incident have been disputed. In such situations it is imperative that any alleged attacker be referred to as such, using terms such as 'suspected' or 'alleged'. In instances where it is clear that alleged attackers could have been safely arrested, such killings should be correctly labelled as 'extrajudicial'.

4. Although most media outlets do take care to quote both Palestinian and Israeli sources, those sources are not always equivalent. One common example is that of quoting governmental officials from one side and political party representatives from the other. This creates a false equivalence and gives undeserved weight to certain voices and perspectives.

5. The goal of objective reporting free from personal interests and motivations is an integral aspect of journalism (Pressekodex Preamble). However, in some cases, it seems that objectivity is confused with neutrality. Examining the facts carefully and reporting the truth, may reveal that the truth of any given situation lies on one side of an argument or the other. By contrast, being neutral, i.e. actively seeking to take a middle position between two arguments, regardless of what the facts suggest, can be damaging, because it creates a false balance and distorted picture of the reality. Our conviction is that, if facts are presented objectively, they speak for themselves. We ask for nothing more than this.

I look forward to working with many of you, whether more closely or for the first time, and to our undoubtedly interesting and fruitful discussions.

On behalf of Palestine and its people, allow me to wish you all a very happy and successful New Year.

With best regards,

Ambassador Dr. Khouloud Daibes