

Barak Medina, Nov. 11, 2025

Dear friends,

Thanks for the greetings. We're excited to launch the international Max Planck Center, hosted at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

The Max Planck Society, among the world leading organizations for basic research, has been the pioneer in establishing the German-Israeli academic collaboration, back in 1959. The close ties were institutionalized through the establishment, some 60 years ago, of the Minerva foundation, which is a subsidiary of the Max Planck Society, and serves up until today as the flagship of the German-Israeli scientific cooperation. We, at the law faculty of the Hebrew University, have benefited tremendously from this collaboration for almost thirty years now, through our Minerva Center for Human Rights. Establishing the international center is a milestone in the development of the close academic relations in legal studies between Germany and Israel.

On behalf of my colleague and friend, Prof. Ralf Poscher, and myself, I extend our gratitude to the Max Planck Society, and to President Cramer in particular, for this remarkable initiative.

Prof. Cramer is not only an excellent scholar in bio-chemistry and a stellar leader of the Max Planck Society, he is also a great friend of the state of Israel and of Israeli academia. He presents his courage time after time. It started in a brave statement made on October 11, 2023, just four days after the horrific terror attack against Israel. Professor Cramer stated, on behalf of the Max Planck society, and I quote, "We stand in solidarity with Israel. We grieve for the lives lost, remembering the Israeli people and others from around the world who have fallen victim to Hamas' terrorist attacks." Prof. Cramer added, already back then, just 4 days after October 7th, that "the attacks by Hamas, and this also fills us with great sorrow, have also caused, and will cause, unspeakable suffering among the Palestinian civilian population. Terrorism does not offer prospects for the future, for anyone."

President Cramer concluded his statement promising that “In these difficult times, we remain especially committed to maintaining our close scientific and personal ties with the research institutions in Israel, and we will utilize these connections to extend support wherever possible.” Ever since, he fulfills this promise. It included a courageous visit to Jerusalem during the war, in November 2023, offering moving words of condolences and encouragement, and numerous other initiatives.

Over the last two years President Cramer demonstrated his commitment to justice. As a true visionary, President Cramer fully understands the challenges that the Israeli academic faces, both externally, due to the growing trend of boycott, and internally, as a result of democratic backsliding. This center is, to a large extent, a response to these dual challenges, and it is established to the great extent thanks to President Cramer’s leadership.

Special thanks are also due to Dr. Lou Bohlen, the Head of Office of the Minerva Foundation, and head of the Max Planck Society's Israel and Middle East department. Lou is not only a colleague but became, through her radiate personality, enthusiasm and entrepreneurship, a friend of dozens of members of the Israeli academic community. Lou was pivotal in the process that has led to the establishment of our center. On behalf of my colleague, Danny Evron, the Executive Director of the Minerva Center for Human Rights, and myself, I just say thank you Lou. You are a true friend. I’m also grateful to the leadership of the Hebrew University for the support and generosity, that were essential to realizing this project.

These are not times for celebrations. We are all still busy in healing the terrible wounds, of both Israelis and Palestinians, that resulted from the two years of war in Gaza. The immense loss of lives on both sides could have been and should have been avoided. The two main lessons of this horrible war are the absolute necessity to thrive for peace, as the alternative is a war in which we all lose, and the importance of the rule of law, of the recognition that even in times of war not all means are justifiable.

The establishment of this center is aimed at three main purposes: study the protection of human rights when facing security challenges; addressing the risks created by

democratic backsliding; and exploring the role of AI in creating opportunities and risks to liberal democracies.

Our fantastic first cohort of young PhD students, one-third of them Palestinians, gives us great hope. They study issues such as the challenges of civic education in Palestinian schools in East Jerusalem, Political and Social Impacts of the October 7th Massacre on Communities in the Kibutzim that were attacked, a study on violence prevention in the Arab sector in Israel, regulating state surveillance of social media, the scope of the right to political speech in the workplace, and more. They are all committed to excellent research, for a dialogue and eager to collaborate with their peers in Freiburg.

The establishment of the Center accentuates the vital role of academic scholars and institutions in not only describing the world but also shaping it and contributing to making it a better place. We should all be willing to take risks, as the alternative is a sure loss of the very possibility to continue to live here. It is our role to lead the way, to follow the call of Julien Benda which described intellectuals as ones whose movement is completely opposite to the realism of the mass, those who are expected to act on the basis of justice.

The collaboration between young scholars, exchange of views, better understanding the narratives, fears and dreams of all persons, are the true path for a better world. We will do our best to meet the expectations.