

December 19, 2019

Dear friends in Belgium,

We, the undersigned, human rights activists based in Israel, would like to add our perspective around the recent campaign against our colleague Brigitte Herremans and the unfounded accusations of antisemitism levied against her.

Many of us have worked with Brigitte, shoulder to shoulder, for the better part of the last two decades. She has been with us, defending human rights, in search of an Israeli-Palestinian peace. She speaks out against the occupation, discrimination and racism and – importantly – educates people about Jewish and Palestinian history and sense of peoplehood. We often rely on her to call out criticism of Israeli policy when it crosses the line into hate. Her commitment to human rights is unwavering, universal and inspiring. It is thus even more shocking and outrageous to see the lies spread about her.

We share concerns with mounting antisemitism and Islamophobia in Europe and particularly in Belgium. With you, we witness the rise in attacks on Jewish communities, as well as on Muslim communities in many countries in Europe. Our communities' need for security cannot be discounted.

As Israelis and human rights activists, it is thus alarming to see these serious concerns weaponized to smear our human rights work and that of our closest European partners. They scapegoat us as enemies of our country, in Israel and abroad.

We call on you not to silence the voices that promote peace, especially when they are critical of those in power. Brigitte's thoughts and words are important in Palestine and Israel, as much as they are in Europe. They are critical to bring moderation into a politically fraught topic and help us building inclusive communities where multiculturalism is celebrated and can thrive.

Irrespective of your stance regarding Israel's current government and its policies, we call on you to examine the facts, rather than rush to judgment and automatically accept the accusations against those targeted by NGO Monitor and some Israeli politicians and, when appropriate, consider inviting those whom you might disagree with to your table. We also recommend you read Brigitte's own nuanced writing on the matter, instead of only being informed by the malicious misrepresentation of her positions:

<https://www.knack.be/nieuws/belgie/jodenhaat-bedreigt-ons-allen/article-opinion-1507797.html>

We look forward to a time where we can see the rights of Palestinians and Israelis respected and a safer, more inclusive, Europe for Jews and other vulnerable groups and to discuss with you how to accomplish that. We congratulate Brigitte on receiving a well-deserved award for her work as a human rights defender.

Yours faithfully,

Alma Biblash, Human Rights Defenders Fund

Avner Gvaryahu, Breaking the Silence

Hagai El-Ad, B'Tselem

Hedva Radovanitz, Bimkom - Planners for Planning Rights

Jessica Montell, HaMoked: Center for the Defence of the Individual

Lior Amihai, Yesh Din

Lior Yavne, Akevot Institute

Rachel Stroumsa, Public Committee Against Torture in Israel

Raluca Ganea, Zazim Community Action

Ran Goldstein, Physicians for Human Rights Israel

Rina Rosenberg, Adalah – The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel

Tania Hary, Gisha - Legal Center for Freedom of Movement

Yonathan Mizrachi, Emek Shaveh

Yudith Oppenheimer, Ir Amim