

**Grußwort zur Eröffnung des deutschen Pavillons bei der
Biennale in Venedig
(18.04.2024)**

Dear Çağla Ilk,

Dear artists,

Dear Professor Raulffs,

Dear Gitte Zschoch,

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very warm welcome to all of you to the opening of the German Pavilion at the 60th Biennale di Venezia!

It was curated by Çağla Ilk under the title Thresholds.

As she put it, “the present is a Threshold – it is a space, where you cannot rest.”

Per definitionem, it is a transition from the past to the future or from one space to another.

I am looking forward to her and the artists’ reflections on the idea of thresholds.

But allow me to share my own thoughts on this metaphor with you.

When I think of a threshold as a transitory phase, immediately the worldwide refugee crisis comes to my mind.

Because millions of refugees and internally displaced persons are stuck on a threshold:

They are doomed to stay right there where they are.

They cannot go back to their destroyed homes and in most cases, they cannot move on to a better future.

For many men, women and children, the space of transition becomes a permanent state of being.

In fact, the number of people who were forced to flee their homes as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, or human rights violations has doubled in the last decade. Today we count almost 110 million.

The war in Sudan that started almost exactly one year ago has developed into the single largest refugee crisis in the world.

Nearly 9 million people have been forced to flee from their cities and villages.

Each day, about 20.000 more people are being displaced. More than half of them children and youth.

We are working hard to alleviate the human suffering and just recently pledged another 244 Mio Euros for humanitarian aid for Sudan and its neighbouring countries.

But Sudan remains a catastrophe that almost slips the international attention due to so many other crises.

I remember well standing here almost exactly two years ago at the 59th Biennale, deeply shaken from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Russia had crossed a threshold.

Since then, Ukrainian people have been living in fear and despair for more than 750 days now.

Russia's war of aggression remains unacceptable.

A blatant breach of international law and a threat to the European security architecture.

Every day, innocent lives are extinguished and people are deprived of their homes.

Therefore, it remains clear for us: We will support Ukraine as long as it takes.

While the war in Ukraine is worsening, the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel on October 7 has brought unspeakable horror to Israelis and also to Palestinians, the effects of which can be felt everywhere, including here at the Biennale.

Let me emphasize as my minister does again and again: Israel's security is our obligation.

Israel has the indisputable right to self-defence under international law.

But this right has to be exercised in accordance with international humanitarian law.

However, the humanitarian situation in Gaza is dramatic.

Therefore, Germany has tripled its humanitarian assistance for Palestinians since October 2023 and we have developed new humanitarian solutions, such as air drops.

The Palestinian people in Gaza need unhindered access to humanitarian aid delivered through international organisations.

What must happen now, is an immediate release of all hostages and a humanitarian ceasefire that leads to a permanent one.

The curators and artists of the Israeli pavilion underlined this demand by deciding not to open their pavilion until there is a ceasefire and the hostages are set free.

We respect this decision because we all have to do everything that we can to ease the suffering.

Otherwise, new hatred will grow in people's hearts.

Only a two-state solution will allow Israelis and Palestinians to live self-determined in freedom and dignity.

There can't and there won't be peace without this perspective, because it will only be peace when there is peace for both, Israelis and Palestinians.

The Iranian attack on Israel on April 14th is an unprecedented escalation that has the potential to plunge the whole region into chaos.

In these difficult times, it is important that culture preserves its unique features, that are:

free expression, room for tolerance and free and open discussions.

I strongly believe that it is the duty of all of us to stand up for this freedom of art.

Therefore, we reject the call for any boycott be it of the Israeli pavilion or of our own.

When we are no longer ready to listen to each other despite very different views, then the playbook of terror works.

So, thank you for coming here today to experience the German contribution of the 60th biennale.

I would like to invite you to the three scenarios that the artists have created:

Here in the pavilion, we see the works of artists Yael Bartana and of Ersan Mondtag.

Yael Bartana invites us to take part in a space journey - to a future far away from our crisis-ridden home planet.

She envisions an existence without religious, ethnic, national and state borders.

Ersan Mondtag directs five performers who bring forgotten motifs from migrant and East German biographies back into our present.

This performance is inspired by the biography of his Turkish grandfather.

It shows how memories of a long gone past cross the threshold of the present and can still be relevant for our future.

You can find the third element of this year's German contribution on the neighbouring island La Certosa.

There, the sound artists Michael Akstaller, Nicole L'Huillier, Robert Lippok and Jan Werner give us their interpretation of the idea of Thresholds.

I am very curious about this sound installation.

It opens today at 7 pm with a curatorial tour.

Come along, access is open to everyone.

I would like to close by thanking everybody who made this opening possible.

My wholehearted thanks go to aęla İlk, all the artists involved and the whole team of ifa.

There are many ways to think about thresholds. Let me end by expressing my hope that the thresholds for those who live in miserable circumstances turn out to be thresholds for a better future.

Thank you for your attention.