

Dear documenta gGmbH supervisory board members,

We, the signatories of this statement, address you today as the participating artists and collectives, along with ruangrupa and members of the artistic team of documenta fifteen.

Following the statement by the supervisory board of documenta und Museum Fridericianum gGmbH dated 16 July 2022, we take the opportunity to write a statement in response to the recommendations initiated by the supervisory board of documenta, and specifically the recommendation to “enter a process of consultation with scholars from the fields of contemporary antisemitism”.

While we recognise and regret the pain caused by the sequence of events in relation to Taring Padi's work “People's Justice”, we believe that this should not lead to a general atmosphere of probing and censorship. We once again express our stance against all forms of discrimination, including antisemitism, racism, xenophobia, sexism, transphobia, islamophobia, anti-Palestinian, anti-Roma, anti-Black, anti-Asian, ableist, casteist, classist, and ageist actions and attacks.

We are deeply disappointed that you chose to ignore the racism and violence that the artists and the artistic direction and team has been exposed to over the past eight months. Many of us have invested time, resources, love and good will to the joint undertaking of documenta fifteen. Artists have spent months and years away from their homes and families to bring collective, collaborative work to Germany and Kassel based communities. These gifts have not been acknowledged or valued in published statements by politicians, press releases and or media coverage.

Since the first media attacks in January, Palestinian, pro-Palestinian, Black and Muslim artists have been targeted and discriminated against by the media, the politicians, and already exposed to censorship by the institution in consequence. This discrimination has made it clear to us that we cannot trust the proposal of the supervisory board. To remind you of some of these incidents, we mention only a few here:

On 23 June 2022 without informing the artists or curators, WH22 Werner-Hilpert-Strasse 22, was closed for at least two hours until members of ruangrupa and artistic team re-opened it.

On the same day part of Hübner Areal, where Subversive Film's artworks were exhibited, was closed for the entire day.

On 10 July 2022 sections of archival material referring to Palestine were removed from the work of Archives des luttes des femmes en Algérie (Archives of Women's Struggles in Algeria) collective without their knowledge or consent. It was only put back on 11 July 2022 upon the request of the artists.

These attacks have created such a climate of hostility and racism towards the artists which lead to exposing them to more attacks, we remind you here of some more:

On 27 May 2022, WH22 the venue hosting artist collectives Question of Funding, Party Office and Hamja Ahsan was broken into and vandalized, with spray-painted slogans reading “187” and “Peralta”. The artists suspected that the slogans referred to the California penal code section on murder and the Spanish neo-Nazi activist Isabel Peralta, who has encouraged violence against Islam. The artists decided to keep the graffiti at the venue, and documenta filed a criminal complaint.

On 13 & 17 June 2022, after 5 days of being watched by a woman in a car, the venue St.

Kunigundis church where the work of Atis Rezistans|Ghetto Biennale (Haiti/international) is exhibited was raided by a man threatening and shouting at the Atis Rezistans|Ghetto Biennale artists present. He was also filming with his phone, and the video is circulating. On 17 June 2022 the same man was loitering outside.

On 2 July 2022, Party Office collective members were attacked by transphobic men on the streets of Kassel and then assaulted by the Kassel Police. The aggressors were let go. Party Office have demanded an apology as to how the situation has been handled and further steps to guarantee their safety and wellbeing.

Numerous cyberstalking attacks and threats to staff members and artists have been made by JuFo (Junges Forum DIG), notably on its Instagram account.

Many other documented incidents took place, as well as institutional racist, islamophobic and transphobic discrimination. Artists and team members working for documenta fifteen are still experiencing multiple levels of harassment, bullying, up until this day.

Besides these direct racist and transphobic incidents artists and lumbung members have experienced structural racism and neglect. These have become explicit through issues related to visa, inhospitality and neglect of data and communication related to artists and workers that identify as BIPOC, non-binary and trans artists. This has obstructed their physical and mental well being and artistic process. This includes several artists and ruangrupa members not having been granted visa or instead granted limited period visas, as well as putting artists in appalling accommodation circumstances. We feel the need to underline that we are not putting these responsibilities to the overworked, understaffed, oftentimes unfairly treated, documenta fifteen team personnels.

documenta's supervisory board's recommendation to "enter a process of consultation with scholars from the fields of contemporary antisemitism" was made against the opinion of ruangrupa and the artistic team. The supervisory board did not consult the participating artists. The supervisory board has chosen this course of action despite its stated commitment to mutual respect, good conduct, and loyalty to ruangrupa, as stated in their contract (clause 12.1 of the Vertrag between Documenta gGmbH and ruangrupa).

Why we refuse the supervisory board's recommendation to "enter a process of consultation with scholars from the fields of contemporary antisemitism"

We would like to remind you that we have attempted to start a dialogue with the forum "We Need to Talk! Art, Freedom and Solidarity" last May, whereby we made an honorable but futile attempt to formulate a good response to a bad question. We also wish to remind you that the dialogue was suspended after intensive discussions with the forum participants, where it became clear that a free and productive discussion was impossible. It followed criticism by Josef Schuster, the president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, over the composition of the forum. Some of the participants withdrew, or considered withdrawing, just a few days before the forum's intended opening.

The artworks have been on display for more than 30 days now. They have been open for the public to see in full transparency. More than in any previous documenta artists have been, and are, present in the exhibition spaces to exchange with the public. The public has responded to the exhibition with great enthusiasm. To investigate artworks and artists is accusatory and disrespectful. We see it as an investigation which could imply that every artist or artwork is anti-semitic until proven otherwise.

Investigating artworks which question and push histories and presents means that artworks

cannot address anymore the complexity of those histories. The role of the audience is to engage with this on an equal level, not in an accusatory manner. Subjecting the artworks to examination will deeply affect their local communities and political contexts.

Accepting an advisory board will become a precedent and will create an environment of fear and self-censorship that will make it impossible for curators and artists to engage openly in a safe environment with the public. Art is not only about aesthetics and comfort zones, art has a significant role in opening channels and dealing with our histories, let it be. This is what artistic freedom means.

This environment of intimidation, suspicion, and censorship is untenable and some of the collectives in the exhibition have been experiencing it for far too long. Therefore, we collectively and categorically object to your recommendation to “enter a process of consultation with scholars from the fields of contemporary antisemitism”, or any re-examination of the artworks. We will not accept any result that comes from such re-examination. In an email sent to the management on 25 June 2022, we asked that the institution immediately stop the re-examination of our works and open all venues and artworks for our artworks to be experienced and embraced by the people without disruption. We ask you here again to retract your recommendation.

We wish to remind you that censorship boards have their histories and contexts in Germany and worldwide. We come from many countries where we face censorship boards and oppression, where we also refuse to abide by them. Censorship committees deprive audiences from the responsibility of engaging, of learning, and unlearning. They deprive the audience from forming independent political views. Censorship committees are the end of an era of art as we know it; they represent the beginning of a new era (or rather the return to an era) where art is in the service of political regimes.

In conclusion we expect the following from the Supervisory Board:

- 1-That the recommendation to hire a board of scholars to review the artworks is immediately retracted.
- 2-That artists and documenta fifteen team members (namely Party Office, Hamja Ahsan) who have sent numerous e-mails about both physical and cyber attacks be answered and followed-up on and that such messages on documenta fifteen official facebook and instagram pages are retrieved immediately.
- 3-That the offenders and perpetrators of the recorded offenses thus far are held accountable by documenta and the city of Kassel.
- 4-That a safer environment free of all forms of discrimination and attacks is ensured in Kassel by elaborating a code of conduct, protocol of complaints, and responsive structure (such as access to the documenta gGmbH lawyers) for said discriminations.

We expect a retraction of your recommendation on the advisory board by 22 July 2022.

Otherwise, we reserve the right to take further action collectively.

We also expect a public apology for ignoring to follow up on or mention the racist, islamophobic and transphobic attacks as well as a specific strategy to address the above mentioned discriminations towards many artists by 30 July 2022.

We are here to stay and want to keep this exhibition open, but with the guarantee of artistic freedom. We are convinced that the artworks can speak for themselves and we believe in the audience’s agency to engage with the complexities of the artworks as responsible citizens without the supervision of the state. We are here for open and sincere conversation and

collective exchange. We are here as humans with our vulnerabilities, strength, courage, and art, and we want to stay as long as possible to invite and facilitate critical and joyful dialogue with those who accept us as equals in diversity.