



### **Public statement on the racist incident in the AStA German language course**

It is with utter sorrow to communicate that on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2020 an incident occurred in the AStA online German language Class, which should not remain hidden. The language classes of AStA (Student Union) are meant to give students the possibility to learn new languages. According to the slogan "von Studis für Studis" (students for students), student teachers teach their fellow peers. Unfortunately, 20 minutes after the German class had started with about six international participants via Zoom, three unknown persons with black screens joined the online session. Instead of introducing themselves, they made threats and racist insults such as "If anyone comes to me I'll shoot them in the head with my rifle. I have a rifle and I shoot anyone I want," or "Refugee Rapist - Go back to your country. The police have already been informed about the incident, and after the initial shock and anger, the question arose: What does this mean for us?

Politicians often say that racism has no place in Germany, however many people experience it on a daily basis. This incident at the German Sports University shows that racism does not take place on the fringes of society, but instead is widely practiced in the middle of society. Moreover, more often than not, any reference to racism is confronted with denial and silence from the public masses.

Across the Atlantic just one week ago, a black man called George Floyd died in Minneapolis, USA due to an unjustified choke maneuver once he was arrested. Regrettably, this was not an isolated incident, but instead just the latest in a long line of murders of unarmed black men. There has been a nationwide response marching and protesting to take action against the injustice of racism which in turn resulted in a worldwide movement of solidarity. Some of you might think, what's the point of me speaking my mind? I can't understand what the people concerned feel, I can only listen. That is exactly where the mistake lies. It is time to speak your mind and break the silence.

Although the sensitivity for racism has increased in society, an incident like this one shows just how quickly you may find yourself in the middle of it. The attack on our fellow international students has shocked us all. Not only the fact that they were attacked via an online educational portal, but also in the most cowardly way, anonymously. Nobody would have expected something like this at our university. We grew up in a society fully aware of what racism and hate in extreme excesses can lead to, what unbridled hatred of "the others" can produce, and it makes clear sense that there's an imminent need for public dialogue.

### **So where do we stand? What challenges do we face? And, how do we deal with them together?**

We currently find ourselves in a difficult situation. Many of us are sitting at home, with our families, friends or maybe alone. Unfortunately, many don't have that possibility of going back home and can feel more vulnerable than ever. To make matters worse, our social interactions have all transitioned to online platforms in front of a screen. Video conferencing apps such as Zoom are experiencing a real boom because they are particularly easy to use, which have helped combat the detrimental effects of extended social isolation. None the less, an ever-increasing amount of data protection and security experts are sounding the alarms about the massive deficiencies. Not only about data transfer, but also about lack of proper security for users.



Yes, racism surrounds us everywhere, but would this situation have happened on the street in the same way? Being able to hide behind a username and black screen makes things much easier, of course. The more digital our lives become; the more unconventional doors will open up for these cybercriminals to commit their acts of desecration.

We see our challenge in raising awareness of these issues. We want to talk about racism. Discussions must not be condemned and silenced, and those who talk about it must not be labelled obsessive, dissatisfied and ungrateful. Talking about racism is a call for solidarity. Talking about it, dealing with it, becoming aware of your privileges. We want to perceive racism and even if we are not directly affected, we stand behind the victims and show emotional support.

At the German Sports University, the motto is "we are diversity". In due accordance, we want to be united and show zero tolerance for such behavior at our university. GSU is not a place for racism and we distance ourselves from people who make such statements.

**Our appeal to you:**

**BREAK THE SILENCE!  
DON'T LOOK AWAY!  
OPEN YOUR EYES!  
STAND UP FOR OTHERS!  
SPEAK UP!  
DISCUSS!  
TOGETHER!**

Steffi Haberstock  
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AStA der deutschen Sporthochschule Köln

Are you affected yourself, or have you experienced racism in any way? There are various organisations dealing with this issue. Here are some examples:

- *Verfolgen statt nur löschen*
- *Grimme-Akademie*
- *Amadeu Antoniu Stiftung*
- *No Hate Speech Movement*
- *Hashtags in sozialen Netzwerken*
- *jugendschutz.net*
- *Love-Strom, Bildmachen*
- *Werte leben-Online*

If you wish to report a hate speech, you are welcome to contact the registration office of the NRW State Media Authority: [beschwerde@medienanstalt-nrw.de](mailto:beschwerde@medienanstalt-nrw.de)