

Reply to Senator Anja Stahmann

My attention has been drawn to the Gastkommentar über Geflüchtete **“Die Lindenstraße wird weiter gebraucht”** von Anja Stahmann, veröffentlicht am Sonntag 19. April 2020 im Weser Kurier.

In the article Senator Stahmann referred to the protesting refugees and those showing solidarity with them as “a small vociferous group” and went on to falsely and cynically draw parallels between the situation of refugees here in Lindenstrasse and the situation in Moria at Lesbos, and the slavery camps in Libya. It is important to set the record straight and correct the obviously misleading information about the protests and the misrepresentations set forth.

First and foremost, nobody from the protesting refugees or those who show solidarity with them describes or compares the living conditions in Lindenstrasse to that in Moria at Lesbos even when the similarities between them are clear. The point to note here and why those camps are mentioned together at the same time however, is the innate belief in the principle of the “Other”; a basic concept of racism, which justifies the different and cruel treatment of other human beings and the way they are being treated be it in Lesbos or in Lindenstrasse. Until recently in Lindenstrasse under Senator Stahmann’s watch, you had 7-8 adults (currently reduced to up to 4) in rooms without windows that could be opened – a situation that the Senator is well aware of because all happens under her control and the protesting refugees who have lived there for months have repeatedly brought it to her attention. Refugees had earlier last summer asked the Senator if she or her children could imagine living in such crowded rooms without fresh air/windows and the Senator was only speechless. Now she is claiming this as a staged reality? I have the impression Senator Stahmann is the one living in a different world.

Employees in Lindenstrasse earned the racist tag because every single day, the refugees are subjected to racist treatments by AWO employees and the security staff of Procertus who have regularly brutalised refugees living in Lindenstrasse without provocation. There have been video evidence of this and they were confirmed by independent sources. The Senator’s spokesperson, Dr Schneider have publicly acknowledged this on Television interviews in the past and promised to redress it only to fail to do anything about it. The several refugee protests over the last summer were amongst other things, primarily against security brutality against refugees in Lindenstrasse and the ill treatment they receive from AWO employees. Some of the refugees who experienced this violence met Senator Stahmann in her office in the presence of other city officials who can bear witness to what Stahmann is now denying.

Here is the irony of the situation in Lindenstrasse in the Corona era. The government has determined at the beginning of March that the virus is dangerous and preventing its spread among the populace is an absolutely urgent task. Therefore, it is extremely important to take some preventive measures including physical distancing, reduced social contacts, and hand washing

amongst others. In cases, where social distancing is not maintained, culprits would even be fined because it would be a violation of the anti-infection law.

But in the camp in Lindenstrasse, the refugees are forced to deliberately violate the recommended social distancing because the conditions there do not permit social distancing to be observed at any time. Until recently, up to 100 refugees were being forced to eat in the Dining Hall all within 30 minutes. These refugees could only take warm water for tea from the same point in the Hall. Outside the dinnertime, refugees have to get drinking water from the washing sink in the toilets because there is no other way to get fresh water to drink. Hundreds of refugees are being compelled to use the same few toilets and without sufficient hygienic provisions. All these essentially contradict the rules set out to prevent the spread of the virus both at the national and local levels. Yet, both the Social Senator and the Senator for Health Claudia Bernhard take comfort in implementing these with the refugees in Lindenstrasse.

Now in the last several days, about half of the refugee inhabitants that were tested in Lindenstrasse turned out positive and the numbers are increasing daily. Any reasonable person could imagine that this would be the case and hence the call to evacuate Lindenstrasse, yet the Senator deliberately left them open to infection there in Lindenstrasse. It is a dereliction of duty of both Stahmann and Bernhard. Currently most Blocks are under quarantine in Lindenstrasse but those who tested positive and negative remain confined together with women and their babies some of whom are just a few weeks old.

Senator Stahmann has come up with the bogus excuse that there is no realistic alternative. For those who may not be informed, many Hoteliers offered their Hotels and informed Senator Stahmann of their readiness to host refugees as the protests intensified in the last weeks. They were vehemently rebuffed and told that their Hotels should not be offered to refugees but to homeless people. Much as the gesture to offer the Hotel places to homeless people is very welcome and long overdue, Senator Stahmann's response to the offer is again very revealing for its attempt to divide and rule in this very instance, to play off the homeless and refugees against each other. Here is the crux of the matter:

The refusal of Senator Stahmann to evacuate refugees from Lindenstrasse is neither motivated by the lack of realistic alternatives, nor interest in the welfare of the refugees in Lindenstrasse, but by some selfish interest for political purpose that is grounded on racism. If the entire German populace is being ordered to social distance and you take measures that specifically compel refugees to do otherwise, the refugees are treated differently because they are not *white* Germans; they are the "Others". Even when this carries the 'risk' of higher infection rate of the Bremen populace, it is fine for the Senator as long as refugees, the "others", are denied equality.

To accentuate this, the Senator argues that decentralising refugee accommodation would not be suitable because "medical and socio-educational care" would not be guaranteed. For a start, there is basically no socio-educational care going on there in Lindenstrasse. This is well known and equally documented. Secondly, Bremen has over half a million inhabitants and as far as I

know, no other groups of people are compelled to live in camps so that they can access medical services. So, if other inhabitants in Bremen can access medical services without living in camps, why is it not possible for refugees particularly when they now face some serious exposure to the Coronavirus as a result of the Senator's negligence?

Stahmann further argues that she needs the camp in Lindenstrasse because Bremen will continue to take in new refugees. This argument is analogous to an Emergency driver who is in top speed, maiming and killing people along the way because he wants to go and rescue somebody who may be hurt at an event. Lives are being deliberately put at risk right now because the Senator is thinking of how she will best attend to new refugees who will come to Bremen in the future.

Overall, the Social and the Health Senators who are both responsible for closing the camp in Lindenstrasse are being extremely negligent and careless with the lives of refugees in Lindenstrasse and their inability to recognise the discrimination and racism that underlies their current policies on this camp is seriously troubling.

Dr. Sunny Omwenyeke  
Bremen, 20. April 2020