



International weeks against racism

Agenda Lüneburg

How did the International Weeks Against Racism come about?

Sharpeville, South Africa: On the morning of 21 March 1960, between 5,000 and 7,000 people gathered at various locations in the small town 50 km south of Johannesburg. They were responding to a call from the Pan African Congress (PAC), which had announced a five-day non-violent and peaceful protest. The people were demonstrating against the pass laws of the apartheid regime. These laws regulated the 'right of residence' of black South Africans. The aim was to keep the number of black people outside the 'homelands' to a minimum, while ensuring that their labour remained available. The demonstrators set off towards the police station in the centre of Sharpeville. The police kept the peaceful crowd at bay with low-flying aircraft and tear gas. Shortly after 1 p.m., the situation finally escalated: allegedly in response to stone throwers, the police fired into the crowd. People fled in panic, and the police continued to shoot. Sixty-nine people were killed, including eight women and ten children. Many – estimates vary from 180 to over 300 people – were injured, some seriously.

Six years later, in 1966, the United Nations declared 21 March as the 'International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination' in commemoration of the Sharpeville massacre. In 1979, the United Nations supplemented this day of remembrance by inviting its member states to organise an annual week of action in solidarity with victims of racism and their allies.

On 10 December 1996, International Human Rights Day, Nelson Mandela finally signed South Africa's new democratic constitution into law in Sharpeville. 21 March is celebrated in South Africa as South African Human Rights Day.

Since 1994, the Intercultural Council has coordinated initiatives and activities surrounding 21 March in Germany. In 2008, the campaign period was extended to two weeks due to the large number of events and increasing participation. In order to ensure the long-term future of this important work, the Intercultural Council established the non-profit Foundation for the International Weeks Against Racism in 2014. Since January 2016, the operational work of the project has been carried out by the Foundation for the International Weeks Against Racism.

What is happening around us right now?

The electoral successes of right-wing populist parties, recent studies and research (e.g. racist discrimination in access to housing), the normalisation of violence against refugees and hate speech on social media, as well as daily personal experiences show how entrenched racist mindsets are, how racism affects all areas of German society, and how low the threshold is for this to lead to violence.

It is therefore all the more important to recognise the underlying social concepts and

mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, to examine (one's own) patterns of thought and behaviour, and to embark together on a path of anti-racism in order to change internalised patterns of thought and socially entrenched structures of inequality.

The International Weeks Against Racism, their cooperation partners and actors can provide a wide range of ideas, impetus and mutual support for this difficult – but unavoidable – task.

The theme of the action weeks is also: 100% human dignity – together against racism.

Who are we and what do we want to do in Lüneburg?

On the initiative of Nurka Casanova, people in Lüneburg also came together for the first time in 2015 to prepare events for the 2016 International Weeks Against Racism. At an initial public meeting, ideas for planning the action weeks were gathered based on social experiences. A key fundamental idea was the binding and continuous cooperation of an open planning group. We are the planning group that

emerged from this in 2016, called 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society'. Below, we present our agenda, which was developed in 2018 and has been repeatedly adapted, as well as our mission statement for organising the series of events as part of the International Weeks Against Racism in Lüneburg.

Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society

The events organised as part of the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society' share the common goal of transforming our society into one that is critical of discrimination and racism. This can only succeed if the organisers themselves have addressed the issue of racism in advance.

Many of us have learned racist thinking, judgement and behaviour from an early age, but it was not labelled as racism. It sometimes seems difficult to admit that we – unconsciously or even against our good intentions – (re)produce racism. As organisers, we want to confront our own racism in order to create a basis for truly solidarity-based and anti-racist action.

We want to see diverse participation. All people, initiatives, associations and organisations in our region are invited to contribute to an open society.

How can events be held during the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society'?

1. We have developed a mission statement. It contains our standards for ourselves. Anyone who participates in the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society' also follows this mission statement.
2. We have a basic understanding of the definition of racism that we share and would like to share with the other organisers.
3. Based on our experiences in recent years and helpful feedback, we have established a number of criteria that can be effective in ensuring the success of events:
 - What conditions are necessary for the implementation of an event and are the topics appropriate?
 - How do we envisage the willingness to work together successfully?
 - How can we prevent racism from being reproduced?

- How can we create accessibility?
- How can we enable safe spaces?
- What exactly is multiple discrimination?

Addressing these aspects is a prerequisite for participation in the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society'. All interested parties should consider for themselves whether these criteria appeal to them and whether they can support them.

We invite all interested individuals and organisations/institutions to actively participate in the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society' and look forward to working together.

What does our mission statement look like?

The 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society' are supported by various institutions, civil society groups and individuals. By organising this annual series of events, we want to send a clear signal for change in our society towards a community that is critical of discrimination and racism. With a wide range of events and activities, we want to enable people to engage with the complex topic of 'racism – causes and effects', especially in these tense political times. The aim is to tackle the task of achieving a humane coexistence in society as a whole.

For us, colonialism and racism are not issues of the past, but rather an integral part of everyday social life in Germany, which repeatedly calls for critical examination.

We try to recognise our own entanglement in racist patterns and our own reproduction of internalised racist images of ourselves and others.

Eine Reflexion unserer Positioniertheit, die sowohl privilegiert als auch nicht privilegiert sein kann, sehen wir als notwendig an, um rassistische Macht- und Ungleichverhältnisse in der Gesellschaft offen zu legen.

The focus is on learning – from and with each other – in order to jointly tackle the task facing society as a whole of living together in a humane manner.

What do we mean by racism?

Our basic understanding of racism can be found in the following text¹:

Racism is the conscious and unconscious hierarchisation and discrimination of people on the basis of constructed differences of an external and/or cultural nature, which is accompanied by a division of society into those who belong ('us') and those who do not ('them'). The attributed physiognomic and/or cultural differentiations are linked to positive ('us') or negative ('you') characteristics (character, morality, rationality, etc.).

The existing power relations (majority rule, legislation, money, state authority, access to media and education, etc.) enforce the establishment of a social 'knowledge' of these supposed differences and artificial attributions, thereby enabling the exclusion and oppression of those defined as not belonging. At the same time, racism can serve as a justification for existing conditions of social inequality and as a legitimisation of domination and subjugation.

Racist acts often do not arise from malice, but from conscious or unconscious ignorance of the significance and consequences of these acts.

Racist acts, even those that are not classified as such by the perpetrators, are always degrading, discriminatory and have serious consequences.

The social and structural anchoring of these practices of violence and dehumanisation points to racism as a phenomenon at the heart of society, which is expressed in the actions of individuals but cannot be explained without reference to its social anchoring.

Racist representations are perpetuated in the media and the arts, in education and science, leading to a problematic normalisation of psychological and physical racist

¹ NeRaS (Ne)tzwerk (R)assismus (a)n (S)chulen; Some of the wording has been taken from the website of the Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland (Initiative of Black People in Germany) (ISD- Bund) e.V. and the Information and Documentation Centre for Anti-Racism Work e.V. (IDA).

<http://www.neras.de/rassismus.html> Stand 02.11.2017

violence. Racism is subject to various historical and social developments and manifests itself accordingly in different social practices.

It is important to note that, according to current scientific knowledge, there are no biological human races, and the term racism stems from an outdated image of the existence of different human races.

Since there can be no division into races for biological reasons, any hierarchy or discrimination must arise from artificially constructed differences, which in turn are reinforced or diminished by education and tradition.

Unfortunately, however, it is not racist routines, traditions and structures that are perceived as problems in social discourse, but only the racist actions of individuals, preferably on the far right of society, who need to be informed, persuaded or prosecuted.

With these reactions focusing on individuals and individual cases, the structural racist oppressions and barriers that are at least as important and decisive in the long term are mistakenly overlooked, whether intentionally or not.

Anti-racism work therefore begins with educating people about the structures that give rise to, propagate and exploit artificial external and/or cultural differences between people, as well as educating them about the serious degrading and discriminatory consequences of racism – even in the absence of malice and in the case of actions based on ignorance. Anti-racism work manifests itself primarily through actions that expose and dismantle racist structures in order to undermine the basis for individual racism.

What are the requirements for participating in the ‘Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society’ and for organising an event?

A few years ago, our planning group and network drew up the agenda and specific criteria for participation in the ‘Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society’ in 2025, as well as the content and format of the events. These criteria are as

follows:

Criteria for new members (private individuals/institutions)

- ✓ Anti-racist stance
- ✓ Agreement with the agenda and mission statement
- ✓ Event objectives must be compliant and verifiable
- ✓ Active participation and exchange within the network
- ✓ A protected and safe space must be provided for network meetings and all events taking place as part of the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society'

The following additional criteria apply to institutions

- ✓ Acknowledgement or awareness that they are not free of racism
- ✓ Commitment of the institution to a fundamental anti-racist stance

exclusion criteria

- ✓ Incompatibility with the agenda, mission statement and working methods
- ✓ Lack of willingness to reflect and engage in critical thinking
- ✓ Risk of co-opting the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society' initiative

The planning group holds preliminary talks with interested parties and organises an information event in the run-up to the next planning phase of the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society'.

If the planning group and the interested parties come to the conclusion that participation is desirable, these individuals/institutions introduce themselves to the plenary. Any concerns on the part of the network can then be expressed. If concerns are expressed by the network, a decision will be made in consultation as to whether or not the individuals/institutions will be accepted. If, on the basis of the exclusion criteria, the network decides by a majority to exclude an institution, this does not automatically lead to the exclusion of the representative. The representative may remain in the network as a private individual

All organisers must announce in advance in the plenary session which event they would like to hold. As the planning group, we offer support and guidance in case of questions or uncertainties. We look forward to a wide variety of anti-racism events.

As the planning group, we reserve the right not to include events that do not meet the criteria or do not meet them to the required extent. Together with all those involved, we want to take responsibility for the success of the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society'.

How do we envisage a willingness to work together successfully?

The prerequisite for the success of a large series of events such as the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society' is the reliable and active cooperation of the organising groups and individuals. Participation in planning meetings is expressly desired and required.

Organisers are encouraged to promote interaction with each other and joint planning. Events should be organised in such a way that critical debates do not provide an opportunity to reinforce the power structures that exist in our society.

This applies both to the planning phase of the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society' and to the types of events beyond that. Cooperation and joint events between participants in the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society' are desirable and promote community spirit.

How can the reproduction of racism be prevented?

The events organised as part of the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society' campaign aim to prevent racism from being repeated, reinforced and perpetuated.

Racism can only be effectively dismantled if people who have not experienced racism make an effort to become aware of their privileged position and are willing to share their privileges.

The organisers have an interest in becoming aware of different power structures and questioning them. That is why the organisers take responsibility for being sensitive in their choice of words and intervene in cases of discriminatory behaviour.

For example, they actively speak up to identify racist comments as such and can come up with alternative formulations themselves and/or with those present. The organisers also pay attention to who, for example, takes up a lot of space when speaking, so that they can intervene to regulate this as well

Responsible handling of copyrights and authorship is of great importance in the context of racism. In particular, we expect that the knowledge of marginalised groups (e.g. BIPOC1) made available at events organised by the white German majority society is identified and acknowledged as such.

How can accessibility and social participation be achieved?

We hope that many people from all areas of civil society will participate. Regardless of any individual limitations, people should be able to participate in the events.

The organisers are requested to be prepared for the participants in terms of language. Essentially, it is important to be understandable in both language use and expression. For individual events, this may mean considering translation.

In order to enable people with limited financial resources to attend the events, socially acceptable sliding scales should be considered for admission fees and accessibility

Barrier-free event planning benefits not only people with disabilities, but everyone. Events should be designed to avoid excluding people. To ensure that an event can be planned and carried out with as few barriers as possible, the venue and its facilities should be as accessible as possible, include a barrier-free toilet and have enough space for everyone. Information regarding accessibility should be communicated with the invitation. It is advisable to ask whether any support is required. More information on accessible event planning can be found on the website of the Federal Accessibility Agency.².

How can safe spaces be created?

Events are often embedded in a historical context. It is important to bear in mind that

²Link https://www.bundesfachstelle-barrierefreiheit.de/DE/Fachwissen/Veranstaltungsplanung/veranstaltungsplanung_node.html

this can have a very personal significance for visitors. For example, people who have suffered traumatic experiences of war, persecution and oppression may not want to visit historically relevant buildings or places associated with these issues.

Safe spaces should also be understood as providing participants with a secure environment. This may also mean that people wish to remain within an internal circle and that events are only organised for specific groups of people (e.g. women, BIPOC and religious communities).

Bringing a group of people together internally can promote a culture of trust. For example, if an event is only open to BIPOC, it creates a safe space – for that time – from conscious and/or unconscious racist behaviour by people who practise racism.

Participants would thus have more opportunities for self-determined action and development within their event. This must be facilitated and supported.

What exactly is multiple discrimination³?

The organisers of the 'Lüneburg Weeks Against Racism – For an Open Society' want to develop and create awareness of the need to address multiple discrimination.

Often, people are discriminated against not only on the basis of a single characteristic due to their membership of various (constructed) social groups, but are also exposed to various forms of discrimination, including racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism (social exclusion and discrimination against people with disabilities), classism, etc. This specific form of discrimination based on a combination of oppressive circumstances constitutes multiple discrimination

The combination of different forms of discrimination directed against a person creates new forms of discrimination, further reducing their access to resources and their influence in society.

It is important to realise that it is not enough to abolish one power relationship, such as sexism, while all other mechanisms of oppression remain intact.

³ See also: RCG – Magazin zu Intersektionalität AG Postkoloniale Migration (en) und Anti – Rassismus. https://heimatkunde.boell.de/sites/default/files/rcg_magazin_komplett2014_10_11_1.pdf Stand 12.04.2024

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