

Dear Colleagues,

Recent global political developments have raised concerns about the erosion of democratic norms and the dismantling of long-standing international alliances. I would like to address how current autocratic leadership actions are actively impacting our international psychoanalytic culture, our patients and ourselves. They highlight the importance of remaining alert to and protective of psychoanalytic values.

As a collective of clinical psychoanalysts, we aim to alleviate suffering while working to understand the root causes of violence, prejudice and the traumatic impact of life endangerment and loss. Psychoanalysis values individuality and diversity, the advancement of knowledge through scholarship, the promotion of dialogue, and the humane treatment of our fellow human beings.

Alongside rising concerns about anti-Semitism and anti-Palestinian animus there is now an intensified focus on the persecution of transgender individuals. As psychoanalysts, we are opposed to the deliberate targeting of vulnerable populations by those in positions of power. This pattern of oppression deeply worries us.

The weekend of February 15th a lecture on trans issues to be given by one of our members was cancelled by an American Institute. The Institute cited the recent U.S. "Presidential Executive Orders" which include restrictions that directly impact trans people and have resulted in a fear of lawsuits. This is the first such cancellation we have learned of in the U.S.; however, it reflects data collected by the IPA Sexual and Gender Diversity Studies Committee that indicate a growing international phenomenon of persecution of gender non-binary and trans persons. Fearful acquiescence to those who seek to persecute vulnerable groups is likely to become more widespread unless we commit to holding our values firm.

The IPA does not condone silencing. We have long benefited from the sage words of Hanna Segal (1987): "Silence is the real crime". But I use the word "silencing" cautiously since it has become politicized. It has been used to describe the reluctance of colleagues within IPA Societies to discuss differing points of view about geopolitical matters – and now about gender identity. The tragedy for our profession would be that an either-or orientation – a taking of sides – could dominate our conversations when it comes to patients, for example trans patients. They themselves are not a matter of debate. They just exist. When it comes to gender non-conforming or trans persons, there is no side to be taken.

When suppression of opposing views occurs, it signals a retreat from the bedrock of our science – a retreat from reflection and empathy. Cancelling a scholarly lecture about trans issues reflects a deeply concerning pattern of growing reluctance to engage in difficult, important conversations. Yielding to external pressures to suppress discussion undermines our potential to think psychoanalytically – with minds open to uncertainty, unconscious dynamics and biases, and the meaning of our and others' actions.

Please guard psychoanalytic values within your Society so that we can think together about the frightening state of the world and how we might better understand and address large group dynamics that result in the metaphoric or actual murder of the other rather than respect for the other – which is our humanitarian guiding principle.

The IPA is available to consult with societies that experience intractable internal conflict. This is the work of the IIC – the Institutional Issues Committee. Also, please let the officers know if your local group faces external pressures to change its programmatic goals. We need to be aware of political influences that may undermine Societies' psychoanalytic values.

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IPA President