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1491. No Nelly Sachs Prize this year: Jury withdraws its decision in favour of Kamila Shamsie

The city of Dortmund will not award its literature prize, the Nelly Sachs Prize, this year. In a meeting held at the weekend, the eight-member jury decided to revise its decision of 6 September to award the prize to author Kamila Shamsie. At the same time, it was decided not to nominate another winner for 2019. This means that the Nelly Sachs Prize will only be awarded again in 2021.

The jury of the Nelly Sachs Prize comments as follows:

"With its vote for the British writer Kamila Shamsie as the winner of the Nelly Sachs Prize 2019, the jury honoured the author's outstanding literary work. At that time, despite prior research, the members of the jury were not aware that the author has been participating in the boycott measures against the Israeli government for its Palestinian policies since 2014.

§ 1 of the statutes of the Nelly Sachs Prize stipulates that the 'life and work' of a personality must also be included in a jury decision. The jury met again on 14 September to discuss the facts that had become known about the author Kamila Shamsie.

The jury decided to cancel its original vote and to withdraw the award to Kamila Shamsie. Kamila Shamsie's political positioning to actively participate in the cultural boycott as part of the BDS (Boycott Disinvestment Sanctions) campaign against the Israeli government is clearly in contradiction to the statutory objectives of the award and the spirit of the Nelly Sachs Prize.

The cultural boycott does not transcend borders, but affects the whole of Israeli society regardless of its actual political and cultural heterogeneity. Kamila Shamsie's work is also withheld from the Israeli population in this way. This contrasts with the claim of the Nelly Sachs Prize to proclaim and exemplify reconciliation among peoples and cultures.

The jury regrets the situation in every respect."

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