

STATEMENT

Epstein Files: Listen to the Survivors

Berlin, 3 March 2026

For weeks, the so-called Epstein Files have been a central global news topic. Jeffrey Epstein was a US banker and multimillionaire who built a network for the sexual exploitation of children, teenagers, and young women in the 1990s and 2000s. He had close connections to US and international politics, high society and science. Since the US Department of Justice released over 300 gigabytes of case files, prominent figures have been in the spotlight of the debate. They are accused of sexual misconduct such as child sexual abuse and other crimes – or knowing about it.

This distracts attention from a crucial fact: Those affected have been calling out Epstein's activities for decades, but no one listened. As Independent Federal Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Germany, we would like to comment on this, point out gaps in the debate and make demands regarding the survivors.

1. The protection of survivors' data must be the top priority

Over three million pages, thousands of videos, and more than 100,000 photos: Since late January, a vast amount of material has been available that has not yet been professionally categorized. While the US Department of Justice continues to withhold documents relating to potential perpetrators, the protection of victims has not been guaranteed. Numerous images and video files containing depictions of abuse are not sufficiently anonymized. This violates the survivors' privacy rights. Even some names and contact details have been published. From our perspective, this is unacceptable. The protection of survivors' data must be the highest priority for authorities releasing the documents. Otherwise, people who had to endure sexualized violence as children or adolescents will once again be victimized.

2. Reporting should be sensitive to the survivors

News reports in recent weeks have often showed an unreflective and sensationalist view of the human rights violations that took place. We criticize, for example, the use of terms such as „Sex parties with underage women“. These terms can be attributed to the phenomenon of the Male Gaze, which describes the depiction of women and in this case even girls through the eyes of a man. The use of the term „Sex“ in the context of sexual violence is problematic. Sensitive reporting avoids such sensationalist reports and trivializations and clearly states what these crimes are all about: The organized sexual abuse of girls and the (commercial) sexual exploitation of young women.

3. Analysis of power relations instead of misinformation

The files are not self-explanatory, and it is hardly possible to distinguish between facts and allegations. Investigative journalists are working to evaluate the files specifically to identify networks and perpetrators' strategies. That takes time, and they are lagging behind while social media is flooded with AI-generated content and false accusations. The mix of shocking details and incomplete information, which is not put into context, forms a breeding ground for conspiracy theories and antisemitic narratives. As a consequence, we lose sight of what is most important: We need a debate about power and dependency that make teenagers and young adults vulnerable. This is reinforced by the absence of responsible parents or other care givers, who were either blinded by the status of the perpetrators, did not care, or simply did not exist. Vulnerable girls and young women were deliberately approached by Epstein and his network. Therefore, the reports of the survivors must be systematically analyzed. We need to understand and define how the sexual exploitation of minors and international human trafficking could take place.

4. Addressing and focusing on survivors—making past injustices a topic of the present

The societal discourse needs to move on from shocking headlines and sensationalism to the important questions: How can the systematic sexual exploitation of children, young people, and young women be prevented in the future? What connections can be made to Germany?

According to the Federal Inquiry, the next steps should be:

- **Support and recognition for the survivors:** It must be publicly acknowledged which crimes were committed against them. Inviting survivors to the US Congress is a first step. For Germany, we also demand a form of recognition for all survivors of sexualized violence in childhood and youth through memorial events, political debates, or places of education and remembrance. Further forms of recognition, such as financial support, must follow. Survivors have a right to support through specialized counseling centers and nationwide protection and accommodation structures.
- **Critical reappraisal:** Why did no one believe the survivors? As early as 20 years ago, survivors made initial allegations of sexualized violence against Epstein. How was he able to build such an extensive international network – even after his conviction? The Epstein case exemplifies how sexualized violence against children and young people is covered up and how survivors are being silenced. Money, power, and international contacts to members of the high society played a decisive role in this criminal network and must be investigated.
- **Independent investigations of perpetrator networks:** Research into perpetrator networks and strategies related to the Epstein files is also necessary. In the English-speaking world, perpetrator networks in the area of child sexual abuse are already an

established subject of social science research. Researchers use methods of sociological network theory and criminological analysis of organized crime to illustrate connections between crime scenes, perpetrators, and survivors. This can yield insights that enable institutions, politics, and society to better protect children and young people in the future.

- **Transparency of the US Department of Justice and investigations in other countries:** The administration must take the survivors' plead for transparency seriously— including the publication of the names of perpetrators. At the same time, investigations must be initiated in Germany and other countries if there are indications that German citizens were involved.

In recent weeks, not only the extent of organized sexualized violence around the Epstein network has become apparent, but also the structural failures in protecting survivors. It is now up to politics, the justice system, and society to learn from this case. This is only possible through persistent inquiry, strengthening survivors' rights, and combating power structures that enable such crimes.

Further information:

www.aufarbeitungskommission.de

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