

University of Haifa

The Senate of the University of Haifa, by virtue of the authority vested in it by the constitution of the University and in accordance with the recommendations of the President and the Executive Committee

hereby confers upon

Sonja Lahnstein-Kandel

the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy, Honoris Causa

In recognition of her tireless efforts in promoting tolerance and coexistence, especially between Arabs and Jews in Israel and at the University of Haifa; for her dedication to the promotion of minorities wherever they are, especially with respect to education issues and the advancement of women; for her many years of advocacy on behalf of the University of Haifa in Germany, and her leadership role in the governance of the University; and for her longstanding friendship with the State of Israel.

Conferred on 12 Sivan 5777/June 6, 2017
Haifa, Israel



Mooly Eden
Chairman of the Executive Committee



Prof. Ron Robin
President



Prof. Gustavo Mesch
Rector



SONJA LAHNSTEIN-KANDEL

Sonja Lahnstein-Kandel is a respected promoter of civic rights, tolerance and understanding in Germany, in German-Israeli relations, and a friend of Israel, who devotes considerable effort toward promoting coexistence between Jews and Arabs. She has been a significant supporter and partner of the University of Haifa for more than 20 years.

Ms. Lahnstein-Kandel, who was born into a Jewish family in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, immigrated to Germany as an adolescent in the 1960s. She studied economics and at the age of 24 embarked upon an international career at the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. When she met her future husband, Manfred Lahnstein (a former Federal Minister of Finance of West Germany – as it was known at the time – and later long-time President of the German-Israeli Association and Chairman of the Board of Governors at the University of Haifa) she decided to return to Germany.

She then continued her professional career in a number of senior positions, including the Regional Manager of the German Development Corporation; the Director of the Draeger Foundation for international economic and development policy; and pro bono Commissioner for Tolerance for the Bertelsmann Corporation.

Prompted by xenophobic and anti-Semitic incidents in Germany after re-unification of the country, Sonja devoted all of her free time to fighting intolerance. In the late 1990s, and together with partners from business, media and culture, she founded a unique nationwide non-profit initiative step21 for tolerance and understanding. step21 runs innovative educational programs that provide social and media competence to youth in schools and in free project work and make use of modern media pedagogies.

The goal was to empower children and adolescents to develop self-assurance and backbone, to stand up for their convictions and against discrimination and violence. In nearly two decades of existence, step21 has worked with over 15,000 schools and nearly one million youth in Germany and neighbouring countries specifically Poland, Austria and the Czech Republic. Several step21 projects were conducted with the participation of and honored by Germany's Chancellor, Parliament and Federal Presidency.

In recognition of her work, in 2001 Ms. Lahnstein-Kandel received the Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany from the Federal President.

Her commitment to coexistence and understanding was also the driving force behind her involvement with Jewish issues and Israel. She serves on the Board of Trustees of the Berlin Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, and of the Israelite Hospital in Hamburg. She also serves as Chairwoman of the German Friends of the Israel Museum, and Chairwoman of the German Friends of the University of Haifa where, until June 2017, she served as Vice-Chair of its Board of Governors. In both these Israeli institutions, she has been instrumental as a partner with academia and students to help launch meaningful and sustainable coexistence programs for young Jews and Arabs in Israel.