



No to antisemitism! No to hatred!

Frank-Walter Steinmeier | 01.02.2020

Federal President of Germany Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the Fifth World Holocaust Forum "Remembering the Holocaust: Fighting Antisemitism" at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem/Israel, on 23 January 2020.

ברוך אֱמֵהּ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם שֶׁהֵחִיב וְקִיַּמְנוּ וְהִגַּעְנוּ לְזִמְנוּ הַזֶּה:

“Blessed be the Lord for enabling me to be here at this day.”

What a blessing, what a gift, it is for me to be able to speak to you here today at Yad Vashem.

Here at Yad Vashem burns the Eternal Flame in remembrance of the victims of the Shoah.

This place reminds us of their suffering. The suffering of millions.

And it reminds us of their lives – each individual life.

This place remembers Samuel Tytelman, a keen swimmer who won competitions for Maccabi Warsaw, and his little sister Rega, who helped her mother prepare the family meal for Sabbath.

This place remembers Ida Goldish and her three year-old son Vili. In October, they were deported from the Chisinau ghetto. In the bitter cold of January, Ida wrote her last letter to her parents: “I regret from the very depth of my soul that, on departing, I did not realise the importance of the moment, [...] that I did not hug you tightly, never releasing you from my arms.”

Germans deported them. Germans burned numbers on their forearms. Germans tried to dehumanise them, to reduce them to numbers, to erase all memory of them in the extermination camps.

They did not succeed.

Samuel and Rega, Ida and Vili were human beings.

And as human beings, they live on in our memory.

Yad Vashem gives them, as it says in the Book of Isaiah, “a monument and a name”.

I, too, stand before this monument as a human being – and as a German.

I stand before their monument. I read their names. I hear their stories.

And I bow in deepest sorrow.

Samuel and Rega, Ida and Vili were human beings.

And this also must be said here: The perpetrators were human beings. They were Germans. Those who murdered, those who planned and helped in the murdering, the many who silently toed the line: They were Germans.

The industrial mass murder of six million Jews, the worst crime in the history of humanity, it was committed by my countrymen.

The terrible war, which cost far more than 50 million lives, it originated from my country.

75 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, I stand before you all as President of Germany – I stand here laden with the heavy, historical burden of guilt. Yet at the same time, my heart is filled with gratitude for the hands of the survivors stretched out to us, for the new trust given to us by people in Israel and across the world, for Jewish life flourishing in Germany. My soul is moved by the spirit of reconciliation, this spirit which opened up a new and peaceful path for Germany and Israel, for Germany, Europe and the countries of the world.

The Eternal Flame at Yad Vashem does not go out. Germany's responsibility does not expire. We want to live up to our responsibility. By this, dear friends, you should measure us.

I stand before you, grateful for this miracle of reconciliation, and I wish I could say that our remembrance has made us immune to evil.

Yes, we Germans remember. But sometimes it seems as though we understand the past better than the present.

The spirits of evil are emerging in a new guise, presenting their antisemitic, racist, authoritarian thinking as an answer for the future, a new solution to the problems of our age.

I wish I could say that we Germans have learnt from history once and for all.

But I cannot say that when hatred is spreading.

I cannot say that when Jewish children are spat on in the schoolyard,

I cannot say that when crude antisemitism is cloaked in supposed criticism of Israeli policy.

I cannot say that when only a thick wooden door prevents a right wing terrorist from causing a massacre, a bloodbath in a synagogue in the city of Halle on Yom Kippur.

Of course, our age is a different age.

The words are not the same.

The perpetrators are not the same.

But it is the same evil.

And there remains only one answer: Never again! Nie wieder!

That is why there cannot be an end to remembrance.

This responsibility was woven into the very fabric of the Federal Republic of Germany from day one. But it tests us here and now.

This Germany will only live up to itself, if it lives up to its historical responsibility.
We fight antisemitism!

We resist the poison that is nationalism!

We protect Jewish life!

We stand with Israel!

Here at Yad Vashem, I renew this promise before the eyes of the world.

And I know that I am not alone. Today we join together to say: No to antisemitism! No to hatred!

From the horror of Auschwitz, the world learned lessons once before. The nations of the world built an order of peace, founded upon human rights and international law. We Germans are committed to this order and we want to defend it, with all of you. Because this we know: Peace can be destroyed, and people can be corrupted.

Esteemed Heads of State and Government, I am grateful that together we make this commitment today: A world that remembers the Holocaust. A world without genocide.

“Who knows if we will ever hear again the magical sound of life?

Who knows if we can weave ourselves into eternity – who knows?”

Salmen Gradowski wrote these lines in Auschwitz and buried them in a tin can under a crematorium.

Here at Yad Vashem they are woven into eternity: Salmen Gradowski, Samuel and Rega Tytelman, Ida and Vili Goldish and so many others.

They were all murdered. Their lives were lost to unfettered hatred.

But our remembrance of them will defeat the abyss.

And our actions will defeat hatred.

By this, I stand.

For this, I hope.

“Blessed be the Lord for enabling me to be here at this day.”

Editorial remarks

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