

Speech by Hauke Jagau, President of the Hanover Region
At the opening of the 'Night' Holocaust Concert in Hannover – January 27, 2020

Ladies and gentlemen, I cordially greet you all and thank you for coming to this concert today to express your sympathy and your awareness of the importance of this day – the 75th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

When I stand here and look into this room, I am overwhelmed by your interest. Last year, exactly one year ago, when we were in Kaliningrad, when this concert was premiered, we said that it would be a great event if we could bring this impressive interpretation here to Hanover. Then of course we thought about the size in which one may actually dare to do this concert, and we were brave and said that we dare to do this in Hanover in the Kuppelsaal. Of course, we did not know that there would be such great difficulties as there were not enough tickets for all that wanted to attend, despite the number of 3600 seats.

So, thank you for being here. It is once again an overwhelming impression for me to be allowed to live in a Region where there are so many people who are sure that they should come here and when it is good to show our flag.

There are so many here today that I can really welcome only very few by name. I would like to heartily welcome the Supreme representative of the Lower Saxony State Parliament - Dr. Gabi Andretta, as well to welcome Lower Saxony's Prime Minister - Stephan Weil and his wife Rosemarie Kerkow-Weil, and the Lord Mayor of Hanover - Belit Onay.

I especially greet Jerry Glantz, the son of Leib Glantz. On the upper right screen, you can see a photo from a young age of Leib Glantz, who was one of the most important cantors and composers of the last century and who wrote the music for "the Night" concert.

Jerry, I am very proud and happy that despite your illness you came to Germany with your wife to attend the concert.

On the photo next to it you can see Elie Wiesel, who wrote the texts that are being recited here today by Mr. Sebastian Koch.

Ladies and gentlemen, 75 years ago today, the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp was liberated by the Red Army. This was not the end of the Holocaust, not only because many people died in the Nazi camps up to the final liberation, such as the father of Ruth Gröne, who I would like to warmly welcome as the last active survivor here in Hanover, but because the Holocaust and its consequences continue to this day in all survivors and relatives.

Those who have spoken to survivors, and I want to recall here the two well-known to us in Hanover, Henry Korman and Salek Finkelstein, who were so kind and so generous in how they performed, with a great gesture without making it a moral issue.

Those who realize in conversations with the survivors that they are haunted every night by what they have experienced there, know that the liberation, which was a very important step, could not lead to the fact that the incredible crime that was committed against people was somehow so uncontrollable that it does not burden us every day - ladies and gentlemen.

And it was not only the extermination of the 6 million Jews. It hit Sinti and Roma, political dissidents, people with sexual orientations that did not correspond to the ideology. They all met the Völkisch - the racist ideas of National Socialist Germany.

All who did not conform to these became victims. It also affected over 20 million Russian people. I find time and again, when I consider what started from Germany under National Socialism, that it is a grace for us that after the suffering and hatred that was spread from Germany, the international community has welcomed us again as a full member. This is something very special and we can be very thankful, if you look at what happened, you cannot understand it otherwise.

I would like to thank the artists who, by the way, have also become the main victim groups of the Second World War. There is the Kaliningrad Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Maestro Arkadi Feldman, who is already sitting here. There is the State Choir Vilnius from Lithuania, which is sitting up there, as well as the Jewish Male Choir from Moscow. There are the soloists, Daniel Mutlu and Benjamin Maissner, both cantors, one from New York, the other from Toronto. They are still backstage now, but applaud louder for the artists after they appear. There is also the soloist Helena Goldt, who was born in Russia and is now an artist in Berlin. I would like to thank the many supporters of this concert. We only managed to organize this event because we have a large and broad community: from the Jewish community, to the Villa Seligmann, to the VHV foundation, the State Capital as a partner, and the big churches. All of them have helped to make this event happen here and therefore it is also a common expression of our memories and of course a question of how we want to look further into the future.

Ladies and gentlemen, let us work together to ensure that the victims are not forgotten and that those who try to spread anti-Semitic and racist ideas again have no chance. Anyone who wants to marginalize minorities, threatens dissenters and tries to silence dissenters is outside of our democratic order.

Intolerance cannot be tolerated. You would not have to believe that those who today try to frighten people, to marginalize them, if they had the majority, would take even a spark of consideration for what they are constantly demanding of our society today, that they are part of this society. It is true that many people are democratically elected at the moment, but they are not democratically minded, and we must always be aware of this when dealing with them. Let us experience this impressive concert together tonight and from tomorrow onwards continue to work together to stand for it, that "never ever" remains and becomes a reality here in Germany and throughout the world.

The Minister President of Lower Saxony - Stephan Weil - will now address you.

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Distinguished President Hauke Jagau!

Yes, it really is an impressive sight that can be seen here from the stage. But it is not only the full dome Hall, it is also not only the common anticipation of all of us for a very special concert evening that makes this special.

Your presence tonight is an expression of a mainstream attitude and it is good to know that this attitude unites us tonight.

Today we commemorate together the victims of the Holocaust. We owe it to Region President Hauke Jagau and many other participants that brought us together here and I would certainly like to thank you very much on behalf of all of you for this opportunity... and I add to this the Hanover Region has been doing an extremely committed memory work for many years and I would also like to thank you for that. I find this work to be truly exemplary.

Dear attendees, the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp 75 years ago is commemorated worldwide in these days. In Germany, however, this commemoration has a different meaning than in any other country in the world. This evening is dedicated to Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize winner and one of the most important voices of the survivors. In 2000 Elie Wiesel spoke to the German Bundestag: "for us victims - everything was German - the Zyklon B, the crematorium, the directives. Until the end of time, Auschwitz will be part of our history " (end quote). So told Elie Wiesel to the members of the Bundestag and basically everything is said with that.

Literally, the greatest crime in human history will always be connected to the name of our country. It will always remain that way, it is irretrievable. Of course, German history also knows a lot of bright moments, but that doesn't change anything about the Shoah.

If, therefore, a German politician named Alexander Gauland, refers to the Holocaust as "bird shit," it is unbearable and shameful for all of us, ladies and gentlemen

But many ask themselves, yes, must we therefore really again and again bring to mind the cruel details of the Holocaust. It is true, just think of the picture of the boy from the Warsaw Ghetto, that we have seen here and to look at it is hardly bearable. Personally, it is always hard for me to overcome, and I think most of us feel the same way, and that's certainly one reason why many people in our society wish we could put the persecution, the humiliation, the murder of millions of Jews and other people behind us.

According to surveys, a majority of our society actually wants this.

By the way, the answer to this question in such surveys has been at this level for a long time, and already Franz Josef Strauss said (quote): "It is time to step out of the shadow of history." Ladies and gentlemen, I am of a completely different opinion: I am convinced that there can be no end, not for the sake of the victims and not for our own sake. Anti-Semitism and racism are not dead, on the contrary they live. According to surveys, about a quarter of the respondents have recorded anti-Semitic thoughts, and by the way, this has been going on for a long time, and we know today that anti-Semitism is increasingly not limited to thoughts, but that thoughts turn into actions.

The failed attack on the synagogue in Halle a few weeks ago shocked us all, but also in our own Region last year there was an arson attack on an elderly Jewish couple, and unfortunately it has not yet been possible to identify the perpetrators!

Anti-Semitism is not only part of our history, it is part of our present today!

Ladies and gentlemen, without question, it is important to honor the victims. But our responsibility goes beyond that, it is a responsibility to learn from history. It is a responsibility not to look away, but to face the reality, a responsibility without reservations to stand by the side of Jews and all other groups that are threatened and assaulted.

I am very grateful that we are coming together tonight in this spirit.

But what is almost even more important to me is that we, that many citizens, also speak out loud and clear on all other days and stand up for democracy and against hate, very personally.

Ladies and gentlemen, when our basic law was written, there was something like an unwritten part of the preamble, consisting of two words, "Never Again."

If these words have been said infinitely many times since then, then it does not mean that they do not have to be said again.

From the Holocaust follows a simple lesson, which we will have to say again and again in the future: never again hatred and exclusion, never again persecution and annihilation, never again!

Thank you for your attention!