

Translation

Message from
Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany
Dr Norbert Riedel

on the occasion of the International Day of Commemoration in memory of the victims
of the Holocaust
Berne, 28 January 2019

(The spoken word is valid)

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

A few weeks ago, on 9 November 2018, we commemorated the 80th anniversary of the Reichspogromnacht in Germany. On that day, 9 November 1938, the first organised violent attacks were perpetrated on the orders of German state authorities, initially against the German Jews, later targeting Jews in Europe. The November pogroms of 1938 represent the unparalleled betrayal of all civilised values in Germany's history.

They mark the commencement of the persecution and extermination of the Jewish population. Jews in Eastern European countries were particularly targeted, especially those in Poland, along with Jews in the Soviet Union and in south-eastern and southern Europe. Likewise, the other countries occupied by Nazi Germany were not spared from the crimes targeting the Jews who lived there. They, too, were relentlessly persecuted and murdered. Up to the end of the war on 8 May 1945, Nazi Germany and its vassal states killed six million Jews, including 1.5 million Jewish children.

It is these absolutely horrific murders – committed in cold blood and with complete disregard for humanity – that we remember today when we gather for this annual event. By marking International Holocaust Remembrance Day, we remind one another that we must act with full determination to make sure the Shoah is never repeated. The atrocities and crimes that were perpetrated against European Jews by, and on behalf of, Germany under Nazi dictatorship are so monstrous and ruthlessly brutal, and claimed so many Jewish victims, that we are at a loss for words to describe them and the shock that we feel.

For all time, the world will associate this greatest betrayal of all civilised values with Germany. No line can ever be drawn under our responsibility for the Holocaust. It is absolutely vital to underscore this again and again.

Moreover, the Shoah will forever remain an inseparable part of humankind's collective memory. We can only learn from the past if we remember it. Knowledge about the Holocaust is one way we can try and ensure that such crimes are never again repeated. That is why it is so important that as many as possible of the Holocaust survivors who are still in our midst are prepared to share their personal stories with us.

You, Mr Winter, rightly pointed out that remembering the Shoah is crucial for the whole of society. We are currently experiencing a shift in perspective, not least because a new generation is coming to the fore. We are aware that the number of surviving eyewitnesses is growing smaller each year. For younger generations, the War and the Holocaust are becoming increasingly distant. To these young people, it is inconceivable that such atrocities could be repeated, and so they are growing less vigilant. We therefore need to be all the more ready to embrace our responsibility to keep the memory alive. That applies even more at a time when we are observing how dark shadows are being cast again over Europe and anti-Semitism seems to be becoming socially acceptable once again. The International Holocaust Remembrance Day also has an important role to play in resolutely countering these developments.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased that Germany has expressed its willingness to assume the Presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance for the 2020/2021 period.

In future, Germany will continue to do everything in its power to ensure that "never again" remains just that.