



"We are fighting antisemitism! We are protecting Jewish life! We are standing with Israel!"

01.12.2020 | Frank-Walter Steinmeier

The Federal President of Germany in a video contribution to an event hosted by the President of the State of Israel commemorating the November Pogroms of 1938 on 9 November 2020.

It was a mild autumn night in Bremen. Fifteen year old Martin Bialystock was sound asleep. All of a sudden, the windows of his family's shop just below their apartment were smashed. He heard people shouting, looting, banging on their door. Martin and his nine year old sister Miriam hid away in the living room. His mother sat in silence, then turned her head and said, "You'll see, they will kill us". It was the 9th of November 1938.

On this very day 82 years ago, several hundred German Jews were murdered. Many more were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Synagogues and places of worship all across Germany were burnt to the ground, cemeteries vandalised, shops and apartments looted and then set alight.

The perpetrators were humans, they were Germans; and the victims were humans, they were Germans. Gerhard Löwenthal, another eyewitness, said, "They were people just like their neighbours, except that they were wearing the then still invisible yellow star".

The November Pogroms did not mark the beginning of the persecutions of German Jews. They were a nauseating outburst of violence following on from many years of discrimination, harassment and hostility. They foreshadowed the unspeakable crimes of the Shoah committed by my compatriots a few years later. And they offer a stark warning for our times.

I am grateful that Jewish life is again flourishing in Germany.

But I am ashamed that Jews do not feel safe wearing a kippah on the streets. I am ashamed that Jewish places of worship need protection. I am ashamed that only a heavy wooden door prevented a deadly attack on the synagogue in Halle on Yom Kippur last year.

We cannot stop at describing our reality, however painful it may be. We need to act. I am grateful that public authorities across Germany are shouldering their responsibility by increasing police protection for synagogues, by cracking down on acts of antisemitism with the full force of the law.

This is the reason why I am addressing you this evening. I want to renew the pledge I gave to you at Yad Vashem: We are fighting antisemitism! We are protecting Jewish life! We are standing with Israel!

I am humbled by the strong ties of friendship our countries have forged over the years. And I am proud to call President Rivlin a friend. Thank you, dear Ruvi, for your trust and for your invitation to join tonight's ceremony.

Ladies and gentlemen, the miracle of our shared German-Israeli friendship will continue to

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flourish if we stand together as we remember the lessons of the past. Remembrance carries the seeds of hope for a better future. Yes: we can find Tikvah, even when we remember the dark nights and days of November 1938.

Thank you!

Source: Website of the Federal President of Germany, www.bundespraesident.de.