

May 3, 2017, 5 p.m.

Commemorative Ceremony on the Occasion of the 72nd Anniversary of the End of the Second World War and the Liberation of Concentration Camps

Opening Remarks

Dr. Detlef Garbe

Director of the Concentration Camp Memorial Neuengamme

Welcome Speech

Dr. Carsten Brosda

Culture Senator (minister of culture) Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg

Speech

Ivan Moscovich

Survivor of the Concentration Camp Neuengamme

Report on the Forum "Future of Rememberance":

Yvonne Cossu-Alba

Daughter of an inmate of the Concentration Camp Neuengamme

Short presentation by the youth project

"Raise Your Voice. Preserve Their Voices."

Music:

Neuer Chor Hamburg

Opening Remarks: Dr. Detlef Garbe

Mr. Senator,
Mr. Gausso, President of the Amicale,
Mr. Moscovich,
Mrs. Cossu-Alba,
ladies and gentlemen,

Together we commemorated the 42000 prisoners who died in the Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps by laying wreaths and flowers at the former detention bunker, where hundreds of prisoners were hanged and 448 Soviet prisoners of war murdered by Zyklon B in 1942. Thank you all for paying homage to the victims.

On behalf of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial and the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme I would now like to welcome you to this year's commemorative ceremony on the occasion of the end of the war and the liberation of concentration camps organized by the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg.

At the same time, we would like to remember all the survivors who, throughout their lives, have been unable to free themselves from the memory of their experiences at the concentration camp. The fact that nine former prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps are with us today, 72 years after the end of the Nazi reign of terror, fills us with gratitude, because we are aware of how much strength it takes for them to undertake these often long trips at their age. I would like to extend a warm welcome to Livia Fränkel from Sweden, Joanna Fryczkowska from Poland, Jewgenij Malychin from Ukraine, Natalija Radchenko from Belarus as well as Chana Weingarten and Chaim Liss from Israel. The trip was not as long for Aron Gross and Natan Grossmann from Munich or for Ivan Moscovich who has arrived with his wife Anitta from the Netherlands and who will address the audience in a moment.

Furthermore, we have many relatives of the former prisoners among us today. In this regard, I would like to mention Jacques Sarête from France who spoke at the Cap Arcona Memorial in Neustadt this morning. He is the son of one of the 7000 prisoners who died 72 years ago today, on May 3, 1945, during the bombing attacks on the ships.

Many relatives of the former prisoners arrived from Belgium, Denmark, France and Netherlands with their respective national associations of the Amicale. I would like to thank Jean-Michel Gausso, President of the Amicale, Martine Letterie, Vice President, and Marc van den Driessche, President of the Belgian Amicale, for their cooperation during the preparation of the commemorative events.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to Mr. Senator Carsten Brosda, the representative of the Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg and Minister of Culture and Media. The Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial is a part of the Ministry of Culture and Media and we truly appreciate

the fact that three months ago, immediately after you had been appointed to the Senate, you agreed to address the audience here today.

We are pleased to have the representatives of the Consular Corps, church representatives as well as the representatives of the Jewish community and other religious communities among us again this year. We extend a special welcome to the members of the Neuer Chor (New Choir) who will provide the musical accompaniment during a ceremony and to the young participants in the youth project, who will introduce themselves with their presentation "Raise Your Voice. Preserve Their Voices."

I would like to thank the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and Media, Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg, Bergedorf Borough Assembly, Schleswig-Holstein Memorials Community Foundation, Helene Müller-Daudert Foundation, Foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" as well as Friedrich Ebert Foundation and the Golem, our cooperation partners for particular events, for financially supporting numerous additional events you can read about in the program flyers. Working Group for Ecclesiastical Memorial Work and the Friends of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial have been supporting us both financially and on a voluntary basis by providing assistance to our guests. Thank you to Oliver von Wrochem and his team for the preparation of the forum "Future of Remembrance"; which provided the platform for the dialogue between the children and grandchildren of the victims of the Nazi regime and those of the perpetrators, as well as the preparation of the numerous survivors' testimonies. I would also like to thank everyone who has helped, the translators and interpreters and numerous volunteers.

I yield the floor to Mr. Senator Brosda.

Welcome Speech: Senator Dr. Brosda

Monsieur Gaussoit,
Mrs. Vice-President,
Mr. Moscovich,
survivors of the Neuengamme concentration camp,
Mr. Garbe,
ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you on behalf of the Senate of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg. It is our honor and pleasure to have you all here today, at the central commemorative ceremony at the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial. Together with the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme, we are commemorating the 72. anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of concentration camps. It is important to do it here, on this place, which like no other place in Hamburg represents the consequences of the racist and discriminatory mindset of National Socialists and it is the right thing to do.

Many survivors and their relatives have yet again come all the way from Belarus, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, France, Israel, Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Czech Republic and Ukraine and I am grateful for that. They, the survivors, are once more raising their voices against oblivion, they are facing their own memories and the questions asked by young people. Meeting survivors represents an especially striking way for young people to deal with the consequences of the National Socialist terror. The survivors are here not only to talk about the past, but also about the future of remembrance.

"Future of Remembrance". That is the name of the forum which took place here at the Memorial over the past couple of days and where the future of remembrance was discussed against the backdrop of recent developments and political crises. How can the history of violence of the 20. century contribute to the strengthening of human rights and global prospects of cooperation as well as to the prevention of the resurgence of populism and nationalism? How can remembrance work in the future? I am looking forward to learning about what ideas the participants have had and what has been discussed.

When we think about the present and the future today, knowing what we know about the past, we must stop and think of those who had advocated remembrance for many years and who have passed away since our meeting last year.

I would like to remember Janusz Kahl. As the representative of the Polish association of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme he served as the Vice President for more than 20 years. Janusz Kahl spoke at the commemorative ceremony at the former brickworks two years ago on the occasion of the 70. anniversary of the liberation. In his speech, he remembered the long fight for the establishment of a suitable memorial. Let us not forget the extent of survivors' contribution to the development of the culture of remembrance as we know it today. It took decades for the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg to face the history of the Neuengamme concentration camp and it was not before 2005 that the memorial as we know it today was finally established.

Ladies and gentlemen, today, 72 years after the end of the war and the liberation of the Neuengamme concentration camp, we have come to a point when a warning voice is necessary. Whenever it is argued that today's culture of remembrance has outlived itself, I can only say one thing: this is absolutely not true.

On the contrary: to remember is the requirement for staying alert and fully aware of the right-wing populist tendencies, animosity directed at certain groups and the attacks on democratic values. That is also why it is clear to me what our duty is: integration instead of marginalization. We have to perceive our society in all its variety, with all its backgrounds and perspectives, we have to listen to each other and take each other seriously. Moreover, we have to urge those who for various reasons see themselves on the margins of the society to take an active part in it.

Memorials located at historic sites like the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial allow us to learn from history. Survivors' reports and biographies of former prisoners are being used here for educational purposes, with the focus on the people who suffered in concentration camps. This helps young people to get an idea of the Nazi era. To further facilitate this, the Memorial started using modern forms of communication. Not only is the history being actively dealt with here on site, but also shared online via social media. The staff is always on the lookout for new forms of remembrance and ways to teach history. They talk to children and grandchildren of former prisoners about the impact their parents' or grandparents' imprisonment has had on their lives. All of this opens up new perspectives for today's generations.

In this regard, I would like to mention the Hannoverscher Bahnhof Memorial, which will be inaugurated in the Hafencity next week by the First Mayor of Hamburg. In addition to this and with the support of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, a documentation center will be established in the years to come, with the focus on the stories of victims while also shedding light on the role of the perpetrators, in particular that of the public authorities of Hamburg.

I am convinced it is necessary to work on preserving remembrance. It does not mean looking back, but ahead, into the future. The President of the Amicale, Jean-Michel Gausso, whose father died in the Wöbbelin satellite camp in April 1945, gave a powerful speech here at the Memorial in November last year on the occasion of the German Volkstrauertag (National Day of Mourning). He invited everyone to fight the current racist and extremist tendencies with determination of "peace-loving fighters of remembrance". I wholeheartedly join this appeal. Whoever calls for an 180-degree turn in a culture of remembrance which has evolved through a painful, decades-long social process of learning to communicate about the past is shaking the very foundations of our national self-image as well as the international understanding. This is another reason why it is our duty to preserve remembrance, today more than ever. We will keep an important place for remembrance and commemoration in our city looking into our common future, the one of democracy and liberty.

Thank you.

Speech: Ivan Moscovich

Dear Friends,

my name is Ivan Moscovich. I was born 91 years ago in former Yugoslavia, which puts me in the group of the dwindling number of survivors of the Nazi concentration camps, by some estimates not much higher than 100.000 survivors today.

I have survived 4 concentration camps and 2 forced labor camps during the Holocaust. I was 18 at my liberation in Bergen-Belsen. My story will be published this year in German. I believe each story of the survivors is different and should be written and preserved but sadly, of millions it never will.

I and my family lived in a city called Novi Sad, Ujvidek in Hungarian and Neusatz if German. My Father was an artist-designer, who had a successful photographic studio called "Photo Ivan" in Novi Sad after me.

I was 15 when my childhood ended and Holocaust began for me and my family. Yugoslavia was partitioned and Novi Sad occupied by Hungary in 1941. By then WW2 and killings were on, but for us in Yugoslavia the horrors were a bit delayed.

Soon the bloodthirsty fascist Hungarian Generals staged a three day genocide in Novi Sad, later called "The Razzia- Raid of Novi Sad", a massacre that shook the world at the time, resulting in indiscriminate killing of over six thousand innocent Serbs and Jews, among them my dear Father. After they took him, my grandparents, my mother and I were also taken to join a long queue of shivering people being led to the Danube beach to be killed. We were saved literally in the last moment when the order came from Budapest to stop the killing, but by then more than 6000 innocent people were murdered with my Father. Dozens of my schoolfriends were killed. The innocent civilians, children and adults brought on to the beach were lined up and shot in the back. Holes in the ice were made and the bodies thrown through the holes. Bodies were washed up for several weeks and months all along the Danube.

By the end of 1943 Hungary got cold feet and started negotiations with the Allies for surrender but then in no time German troops occupied Hungary. Its fascist antisemitic leaders, collaborating with the Nazis, started planning the destruction of 400,000 Hungarian Jews and their forthcoming deportation to Auschwitz.

We soon got a letter with the date of our forthcoming deportation.

During the long train ride to Auschwitz a sudden violent rage overwhelmed me. How could all this happen? I thought that nothing in the world could be worse than being thrown out of your own home, removed from your everyday life and deprived of the capacity to exercise your own will, only to be killed.

This rage helped me to survive the awful conditions in the camps, almost until the liberation. I believe this rage was somehow my survival mechanism and it worked for long.

Our train left in the evening and late the following evening we arrived at Auschwitz. I stepped into another world: Hell on Earth.

I never saw my grandparents again. After the selection process they were taken to the crematoria.

I saw the tall chimneys, with smoke billowing out of them. One of the kapos told us in Yiddish: "Don't worry. You will not stay here long. You'll escape through that chimney."

The worst were the awful morning appels-the 'roll calls'. The prisoners had to stand for hours, sometimes even all day long, until the counting began. The sick were dragged out of their bunks to take part. Even those who died during the night had to be carried out and propped up in position so that they could be counted.

Then we were tortured for hours by what the SS and kapos called "sport" – a number of sadistic exercises,

or even killings, invented on the spur of the moment by the SS or the kapos.

The Nazi system was designed to provide food rations sufficient to keep a prisoner alive for an average of three months, after which the prisoner was supposed to starve to death in order to make room for new arrivals.

For long months heavy killing work followed in Auschwitz and later in Wustegiersdorf a nearby forced labour camp. My back was heavily damaged carrying heavy rails. In Jan 1945 Auschwitz was evacuated and 60,000 prisoners were marched westward, and I joined the infamous "Death March of Winter 45" from Auschwitz, my group to Bergen-Belsen, 800 kilometers away.

I had no coat or blanket. The SS guards were driving us like madmen, we were no longer marching: we had to run. Every now and then, shots were heard. The SS had orders to shoot those who could not keep up.

As dawn broke we were miles away from Auschwitz. Every 50 metres or so, bodies lay in ditches beside the road, with abandoned blankets. I took two blankets and a pair of good shoes.

Of those 60,000 prisoners who marched westwards from Auschwitz, one-third – about 20,000 – died along the way. And for those who survived, survival meant arriving, starving, frozen and exhausted at different destinations all over western Germany. Possibly the worst fate awaited the largest contingent I was part of, about 10,000 in all, when we finally arrived at Bergen-Belsen.

Fifty thousand prisoners were at that time, confined behind barbed wire with no food and no water. Typhus had begun to break out, and hundreds were dying every day.

Luckily for me, the SS still needed prisoners for work. After just a few days in Bergen-Belsen, a "selection" was announced for 500 volunteers in "good" shape, which meant anyone who could still stand and walk. They still needed workers. Without any hesitation I volunteered.

We were taken to clear the bombarded railway station in nearby Hildesheim, a beautiful city near Hannover.

Our job was to dislodge the wagons to free the rails so they could be restored and used again for German transports to the front and elsewhere.

We were working in small groups, each group allocated to clearing a small area around and inside of a carriage. Our spades cut through many layers of debris as we tried to free the entrances to the cars. My small group discovered masses of burnt sugar inside our car. I probably swallowed several kilograms of sugar. Other groups discovered cars loaded with butter, even eggs. We were not allowed to leave our working areas with food, but we still managed to do that, risking our lives, to be shot if discovered, by bringing food hidden beneath our pyjamas in the evenings for exchanges.

Sugar was a highly valuable commodity. The barter and exchange of food went on at night for a few valuable life-saving days.

A young Yugoslav boy who was hiding a sardine conserve was discovered and shot dead by one of the SS guards, only a few centimetres from me. I was then carrying in my pyjamas a few kilograms of sugar for later exchanges. My face was sprayed with the young boy's blood and brains.

One day I suddenly heard a strange zooming noise above and realized that the sky was filled with planes. 280 Lancaster bombers came to destroy and burn down Hildesheim. They dropped 400 tons of high-explosive bombs and 600 tons of incendiary bombs.

It all happened in seconds. One moment we were all working on the rail carriages, and the next everything and nearly everybody around me was on fire ... prisoners and German guards alike. The bombs were falling around me, left and right, as I was running out of the railway station.

The group of my guards ran into a nearby air-raid bunker, which was hit by a big bomb a minute later – killing all the German soldiers and the SS,

For two days we were forced to carry dead German bodies out of the still-burning houses, placing each body before the entrance of the house from which they had been taken, for easier identification. The burned black bodies were bloated and absolutely unrecognizable. It was strange to do this job alongside the native Germans.

From Hildesheim the next day my group was marched to Ahlem, a concentration camp near Hannover. We were put to work in an underground asbest mine, the SS was enlarging, converting it into an ammunition depot that would be hundreds of feet beneath the surface and safe from aerial attacks. The race was on to get it done as soon as possible and we were hysterically driven by the crazed SS guards and the capos to accomplish it, while mercilessly killing and decimating my group.

By that time the Germans must have known that the war was lost but there we were, in March 1945, building an underground factory for making ammunitions for their war effort.

Ahlem was finally evacuated on 6 April 1945 and I left to continue the Death March to Bergen-Belsen, the second time, leaving behind hundreds of dead and sick prisoners left to die in the Ahlem camp.

Out of many only about 400 made it to Bergen-Belsen: The rest were unable to keep up with the pace of the forced march and were shot by the SS guards.

When I entered the gates of Bergen-Belsen the second time, I realized I was back in a world of unimaginable horror, worse than anything experienced before. In my condition, I felt, finally, this must be the inevitable end.

There were more than 15,000 unburied corpses everywhere around. They were also stacked in piles in several barracks filled up to their ceilings and spilling out of their entrances. Corpses were just lying around everywhere as far one could see and, after we arrived, more were dying every day.

Among the masses of dead lying around on the ground were hundreds of "Musselmen", slaves who were in their last hours or minutes fading away into death, or already dead. You could not tell which was which because their eyes were open. I don't know whether death from starvation occurs always with the eyes open. The most horrific last few days of Bergen-Belsen were still before me.

It is impossible to describe the last days in Bergen-Belsen. It was the ultimate in human misery, suffering, degradation, death and humiliation.

The SS knew that the war was lost for them and tried, almost hysterically, to cover up their crimes. The kapos were ordered by the SS to clear the bodies lying around and throw them into giant pits.

For several days an infernal cat-and-mouse game was played between the kapos and those few inmates still capable of moving. Once caught two prisoners or more were forced to drag a skeleton into the pits. We had to tear blankets into thin strips and bind the strips around the hands and legs of a corpse then drag the corpse into the pits. The noise of the clanking bones on the bumpy ground was maddening.

I was forced again and again to carry the next body, until the late night.

At the end of a day, I knew I would not last for one day more.

Late that night when we were herded back to our barracks, I stayed sitting on the ground, choosing an area covered by dead bodies and "Musselmen". I sat as still as I could pretending to be a "Musselman".

When all the groups of slaves were herded back for the barracks it was already dark. I was waiting unmoving for hours until it was pitch dark and then crawled into the nearest barrack filled with corpses. I climbed to the top of the pile of dead bodies, which reached up almost to the ceiling of the barrack. On top of the corpses I fell asleep.

I may have been asleep a day or two – or even more. When I awoke through a ventilation slot I saw several British Jeeps cautiously entering my barrack. I was free.

Hospitals followed, then several months of recuperation in Sweden. Then back to Yugoslavia, where I met my Mother who came back home before me from Mauthausen liberated by the US Army.

I got my first job in Yugoslavia, I even got a medal from Tito himself. Finished my studies and emigrated to Israel. In 1955 found my dear Anitta and as a compulsive workaholic with her for 62 years spending a life of creation and creativity. Without her I would not be here with you today.