

Speech of welcome Oliver von Wrochem, Head of Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, commemoration ceremony Neuengamme, 3 May 2021

Dear Ms Fränkel, dear Livia, representing the survivors who are commemorating the day of the liberation of the prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp with us,
dear President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme, dear Martine Letterie, representing the many relatives who have tuned in from all over the world,
dear First Mayor Tschentscher, representing the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg,
dear Ministerial Department Head Bering, representing the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media,
dear Culture Minister Prien, representing the state of Schleswig-Holstein, where the concentration camp prisoners who died shortly before their liberation were commemorated this morning at the *Cap Arcona* monument in Neustadt-Pelzerhaken,
ladies and gentlemen, dear friends at your computer screens,

We want to commemorate the 76th anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of the concentration camps with you. On behalf of all the employees, I would like to welcome you warmly as Head of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial. I especially want to welcome everyone watching this ceremony from near and far.

It is an unusual moment to be speaking today in the former brick factory in front of so many empty chairs. It is also a moment of mourning for the fact that the coronavirus pandemic has once again dashed our hopes of observing this day together here.

How we would have liked to make up for missing the international commemorative ceremony for the 75th anniversary of the liberation, which we had to cancel last year!

How we would have liked to have you here with us today, dear survivors, dear relatives of former concentration camp prisoners, to listen to you, speak with you, remember with you!

Since we unfortunately cannot welcome you here in Hamburg, we thought about how you could be present here nonetheless – present with your memories and stories, with your thoughts and hopes. So we asked you to send us items that are associated with your memories.

We are delighted and I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart that so many of you from different countries responded to our request. Most of the items were sent to us by email, but some – such as this – reached us by post.

On a website that is now online under kz-gedenkstaette-neuengamme.de/erinnerungen we used your submissions to create a multimedia presentation which tells the stories behind the objects in German, English and French.

I would like to thank Professor Detlef Garbe from the Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centres as well as all of the employees for their great efforts in planning and carrying out this commemorative ceremony and the digital commemoration.

Special thanks go to the members of the Hamburger Camerata for the musical accompaniment to the ceremony, with Professor Frank Löhr on the piano and conducting.

The people amongst us who survived the persecution and violence of the National Socialists are now at a very advanced age. It is painful for all of us that those of you who wanted to travel to Hamburg last year for the commemorative ceremony were unable to do so in the end. It makes me and all of us very sad that it can be no different this year.

But we hope that, in the autumn of this year, we will be able to make up for some of the encounters we have been denied, and to once again welcome survivors and their relatives as our guests in Hamburg.

Many survivors of the Neuengamme concentration camp left us in the past year. Some of them died of Covid-19. All of them remain in our memories and in our hearts.

I would like to read the names of ten of the deceased who were especially connected to the Memorial, in memory of all the prisoners of the Neuengamme concentration camp who died without us knowing about it.

Jewgenij Malychin (Ukraine)

Lucille Eichengreen (USA)

Haim Liss (Israel)

Miloš Poljanšek (Slovenia)

Roman Kamieniecki (Poland)

Gloria Hollander Lyon (USA)

Mads Madsen (Denmark)

Susanna Dóczy (Hungary)

Alfredo Rotella (France)

Laszlo Berkowits (USA)

Jerzy Stoberski (Poland)

We will not forget you, and we will preserve your memory.

We will now hear some remarks from Mayor Tschentscher, from Department Head Bering of the Federal Chancellery, and from Minister Prien, who is responsible for education, science and culture in the state government of Schleswig-Holstein.

I would like to thank you for attending today as representatives of the federal states and government. Your presence shows that remembering the crimes of National Socialism is a socio-political duty that has become firmly anchored in our society.

After a short musical interlude, we will hear the key speech of this event from concentration camp survivor Livia Fränkel from Stockholm. We will play a recording of her speech, as well as the speech by the President of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme, Dr Letterie, which will conclude the commemorative event in the former brick factory.

After a final musical piece, we will walk together to the International Monument to hold a memorial ceremony there. You will also be able to view this ceremony on the livestream.

Thank you very much. I will now hand over to the First Mayor.