

**Speech Maria Bering, Head of Department and Leader of the group
"History, Memory" with the Federal Commissioner for Culture and the
Media, commemoration ceremony Neuengamme, 3 May 2021**

The Nazi reign of terror is a shameful and unfathomable part of German history, without which Germany's identity today and the self-conception of German society cannot be understood.

The federal government has a responsibility to keep alive the memory of the victims of National Socialism and to vigorously oppose any flare-up of National Socialist thought.

It has been a great honour for me personally, in the course of my duties for the German Federal Commissioner for Culture and the Media, to have met numerous survivors of the former concentration camps and many relatives of people who were persecuted. These encounters have always affected me deeply. In such encounters, you sense how the remembrance of the victims of National Socialism has another important dimension, beyond just the acceptance of state or social responsibility for grappling with the crimes of the Nazis. At its core, it is about people who had to experience unimaginable suffering; it is about their dignity, and about respect for their lifelong achievement of enduring and processing what they suffered.

The irrepressible will to live – to survive – is a common theme in many survivor accounts. The writer Anna Seghers tries to describe this attitude in her novel *The Seventh Cross*. I quote:

'We all felt how profoundly and how terribly outside forces can reach into a human being, to his innermost self. But we also sensed that in that innermost core there was something that was unassailable and inviolable.'

It is deeply moving when survivors speak of this inner rebellion, this inner opposition. And there is also something consolatory about it, when the perpetrators were unable to break people internally.

It is painful that the coronavirus pandemic has made it impossible for us to meet personally and remember together here at the memorial this year.

The pandemic has made it harder to visibly and appropriately commemorate the victims of National Socialism, particularly for survivors and their relatives. It has also posed unimagined challenges for memorials in their important educational work.

The distinguishing feature of historical-political education at authentic sites has always been the opportunity for people to encounter one another, to experience and be affected by the aura of the historical site, and to engage with history through interaction with others.

The pandemic has made it especially clear that memorials benefit from developing and trying out digital forms of education. This was already important in the past for reaching new target groups, but now it is essential to be able to convey content digitally.

The Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial has been extraordinarily active in this field for many years. The memorial's employees have launched numerous successful initiatives on social media with a great deal of creativity and professional expertise. The tremendous response from young people in particular shows that you are on the right track here.

In addition to annually co-funding the maintenance of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial, the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media is pleased to support these special efforts. Through the 'Young People Remember' funding programme, she is financing the #WaswillstDutun (What Do You Want to Do?) project of the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial. Interviews are being conducted with the descendants of former prisoners of Neuengamme, with the aim of prompting young people to engage with their own biographies in Instagram Stories and elsewhere.

This project testifies to the fact that the experience of persecution continues to shape the second, third and fourth generations of the families of the persecuted individuals into the present day. At the same time, young people can use familiar media channels to forge connections to their own family history and their own everyday life with sensitivity and creativity. The initial results from this multi-year project are already available on social media. They show that the idea works very well.

Three exciting projects are also being financed in Schleswig-Holstein through the 'Young People Remember' programme. The memorials at the former satellite camps of Neuengamme

in Ladelund and Kaltenkirchen and the Ahrensböök Memorial are currently carrying out projects to develop educational formats for young people with a lasting impact, and to establish new axes of cooperation between the memorials and other educational institutions such as universities and schools.

These examples illustrate that, even during the coronavirus, it is possible to maintain this remembrance work and to reach people. The federal government will continue to support these institutions as best it can.

The historical-political educational efforts of these institutions make an essential contribution to encouraging young people in particular to engage with the history of National Socialism. And by forging connections to the present day and to the reality of life today, memorials and documentation centres also exert an important influence in countering discrimination, antisemitism and antiziganism.

With this in mind, I hope that all of us can soon return to normality so you can continue your important work through face-to-face encounters and personal interaction once again.

Thank you for your attention!