

Speech by Karin Prien, Minister of Education, Science and Culture of the State in Schleswig-Holstein, Neuengamme commemoration ceremony, 3 May 2021

Dear Dr von Wrochem,
dear Professor Garbe,
dear Mayor Tschentscher,
dear Ms Bering,
dear survivors and relatives,
ladies and gentlemen,

I very much regret that we have to resort largely to virtual remembrance in Neuengamme again this year. Particularly at a moment like this, when human contact provides comfort, strength and confidence.

Personal interaction, direct conversation, meeting, embracing – all of this is not only essential to our survival as individuals, it strengthens the cohesion of our society. When algorithms shape our culture of debate, we sometimes lose valuable, quiet nuances. We have to show more empathy and engage more with our counterparts.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer said: 'Only from the peace when two or three are gathered can the great peace for which we hope begin to grow.'

This is why all commemoration must be accompanied by encounters. But there are fewer and fewer eyewitnesses. Only very few people today can tell us about National Socialism from their own observation and experience. Those who still can and do lived through the Nazi period as young children. It is a great rupture when people who experienced the injustice first hand no longer have a voice in the social debate.

I am very thankful that Livia Fränkel, a survivor of the Neuengamme concentration camp, will speak to us in a few moments.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the future we will have to focus more on the descendants of the second and third generation of people persecuted by the Nazis, on transgenerational remembrance, cross-generational narrative projects and encounters, as well as forms of memorial culture in the migration society. We want to reach as many people as possible and address the full spectrum of society.

The past year has shown us the importance of cohesion across generations, and how reliant we are on participatory and inclusive communication formats. We have all learned through new digital and media channels, in work camps, through storytelling, through radio, film and art projects.

I am very pleased that Neuengamme, as a 'big' memorial with institutional funding from the federal government, is creating impetus for Schleswig-Holstein and cooperating closely even on crossover projects, including as a venue for the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, for example. Schleswig-Holstein is creating impetus, too: as of this year, we are observing 8 May, the end of World War II, as an official remembrance day.

Today we jointly commemorate the victims of the reign of terror, the victims of the genocide, of the concentration camps, the victims of punitive operations in the occupied territories, the victims of the war and victims in the civilian population. We commemorate the Jewish men and women, Roma and Sinti, homosexuals, and people with disabilities, everyone who was persecuted by the Nazis.

We are all responsible for ensuring that our constitutional state remains well-fortified against group-based hostility.

Whether it is conveyed in German or another language, in sign language or simplified language, the message is always the same: never again. Never again can we allow such crimes to be committed against humanity.