

Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centres Jean-Dolidier-Weg 75 21039 Hamburg

Year-end circular letter
to survivors, to relatives of Nazi persecutees,
and to the friends of our work
at the memorial site

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Dear Madam, dear Sir, dear Friends,

Once again we have all experienced a year in which the effects of the Covid pandemic has had a huge impact. And, once again, events have had to be cancelled, postponed or relocated to the digital sphere. During the first few months of the year, we had to close down the exhibitions at the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial and the other places of remembrance under the remit of the Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centres. Our hopes were rekindled when we were allowed to re-open from March 12, but then the situation as a whole began to deteriorate rapidly and we were forced to close again just eight days later. It was not until May 18 that Neuengamme was able to open its doors, subject to the all too familiar restrictions imposed by infection prevention, with other sites opening even later. Accompanied groups and educational offers could not go ahead until June.

The commemorations marking the anniversary of the liberation again coincided with the lockdown period. For months we had worked together with the associations of the Amicale Internationale KZ Neuengamme (AIN) to reschedule for this year the 75th anniversary events that had already been called off in 2020. But then travel arrangements had to be cancelled once again, and the invitations previously sent out were suspended. Given the advanced age of the survivors, this is particularly tragic.

Indeed, this year saw the passing of several people who survived Neuengamme Concentration Camp as prisoners and had been associated with the Memorial for many years. Among them are Roman Kamieniecki (Poland), Neonila Kurlyak (Ukraine), Karl Salling Møller (Denmark), Melitta Stein (USA), Elizabeth Just (Australia), and Mogens Henrik Nielsen (Denmark). Some died of Covid 19. How we wish we could have met them one more time. Our thoughts are with them and their families.

We were able to welcome Neuengamme survivor Livia Fränkel on the 76th anniversary of the liberation, albeit digitally. She and AIN President Dr Martine Letterie sent video messages from Sweden and the Netherlands to the main commemorative ceremony. There, on May 3, Hamburg's First Mayor Dr Peter Tschentscher, Schleswig-Holstein's Minister of Education Karin Prien, and

Maria Bering as representative of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media spoke in front of 1,000 empty chairs at the Klinkerwerk – highly symbolic in itself. The event was broadcast live by NDR, which meant that guests from all over the world were able to participate at least online. The multilingual multi-media reportage *Gegenstände tragen Erinnerungen* [Objects Carry Memories] was also very well received. Around the globe, survivors and relatives were kind enough not just to make astonishing mementos available for the anniversary of the liberation, but also to share their very personal accounts. This remarkable 'scrollytelling' feature can still be viewed at <https://www.kz-gedenkstaette-neuengamme.de/en/memories/>. Our heartfelt thanks to each and every one of them!

On May 8, we also went online with our redesigned 'Memorials in Hamburg' portal, with many new functions, updated information and sites: <https://gedenkstaetten-in-hamburg.de/>.

We are hopeful that, next year, we will be able to hold the events on site commemorating the anniversary of the liberation. All the surviving former prisoners of Neuengamme Concentration Camp are to be invited. We do not know whether their advanced age will permit them to embark on such a long journey. We sincerely hope that some of them will be able to attend.

Despite all the restrictions, many activities did take place over the past twelve months, which for us was the second year of operations in our new organisational structure as a Foundation. At the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial we showcased the exhibition by Dutch photographer duo Chris en Marjan entitled *Snow in Summer: The Future of Remembrance*, the touring exhibition by the Arolsen Archives *#StolenMemory*, and the exhibition *Luise. Archaeology of an Injustice* by photographer Stefan Weger. We also revived our special exhibition *Survived! And Now? Hamburg Victims of Nazi Persecution after their Liberation*. Our exhibition *Around the Alster – Hamburg's History under National Socialism* also guested at the Central Library of the Bücherhallen Hamburg. Unfortunately, in January/February of this year, we were unable for the first time to put on an exhibition at Hamburg City Hall on Remembrance Day for the Victims of National Socialism; the presentation of the exhibition we prepared entitled *We cannot have the National Socialist past catching up with us. Right-wing extreme violence in Hamburg from 1945 to the present* is to be held as soon as possible.

Several events took place in connection with anniversaries. On the 80th anniversary of Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, we took part in the series of events *Das Jahr 1941. Ereignis und Erinnerung* [1941. Event and Remembrance] staged by several universities and institutes. It included a panel discussion as part of the annual congress of the German-Russian Commission of Historians as well as a theme day on Soviet POWs at Neuengamme Concentration Camp. On May 16, we participated in the commemorative ceremony at the denk.mal Hannoverscher Bahnhof marking the anniversary of the deportation of north German Sinti and Roma. On October 25, we joined the Jewish communities in commemorating the 80th anniversary of the deportation of north German Jews to Lodz, Minsk and Riga. To mark the 40th anniversary of the opening of the Neuengamme Dokumentenhaus exhibition building, an event entitled *Geschichte dingfest, fälschungssicher machen* [Securing history and making it unfalsifiable] took place at the Museum

for Hamburg History, attended by many of those who had been involved in memorial work during the 1980s.

Towards the end of the year, the 7th Future of Remembrance *Forum* was held with international participation from November 10 to 12 in the run-up to the AIN annual conference. This year again we were able to hold several events in Hamburg and/or online with survivors, for example with Marione Ingram, Dita Kraus, Helga Melmed and Marian Hawling.

This year's publication projects included the issue of the German/English exhibition catalogue *The Stadthaus and the Hamburg Police during the Nazi Era*, and the short guide *Gedenkstätte Konzentrationslager und Strafanstalten Fuhlsbüttel 1933-1945 – Geschichte des Ortes und Entwicklung der Gedenkstätte* [Fuhlsbüttel Concentration Camp and Prisons Memorial 1933-1945 – History of the Site and Memorial Milestones]. The volume *Religious Practice in Concentration Camps and Other Nazi Detention Facilities* was also published as the second issue in the new series on *Contributions to the History of Nazi Persecution*.

Due to the long periods during which the memorial sites had to remain closed because of the Covid pandemic, we again experienced a noticeable drop in the number of visitors this year, just as we did the previous year. Nonetheless, we were pleasantly surprised that, in the months from August to October, we did manage to achieve the high visitor numbers from the pre-Covid era. By the end of the year, we expect that a total of some 70,000 people will have visited the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial first and foremost. The decline in visitor numbers is therefore expected to be around 40 per cent compared with the total number of visitors in 2019 at 123,230.

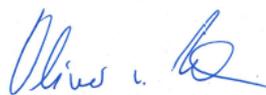
Social interaction and our economic and cultural life have all fallen victim to the pandemic. Like everyone else, we too hope that the times when we are compelled to work and live with the restrictions necessary for infection prevention will soon be over. And we need to be wary that those who try to divide our communities with their conspiracy ideologies and recriminations and undermine the all-important sense of solidarity do not inflict lasting damage on our democracies. Everywhere right-wing extremist forces are trying to exploit the insecurity of many people and tap into their discontent for their own ends. International vigilance is needed so that the spirit of cohesion is not ousted by one of discord.

We wish you all a safe and sound journey through these difficult times.

For now, on behalf of all our staff, may we wish you a contemplative end to the year, and a healthy and peaceful 2022.



Prof. Dr Detlef Garbe



Dr Oliver von Wrochem