

3 May 2026

Programme for the Commemoration Ceremony

marking the 81st anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation of the concentration camps

- Music** **Partita in D minor for violin, BWV 1004, 'Sarabande'**
composed in 1720 by Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
- Welcome** **Prof. Dr Oliver von Wrochem**
Director of the Foundation of Hamburg Memorials and Learning Centres
- Greeting** **Carola Veit**
President of the Parliament of the Free and Hanseatic City of Hamburg
- Greeting** **Maria Bering**
Deputy Head of Office at the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media
- Music** **Sonata No. 3 in D minor for violin, Op. 27, 'Ballade'**
composed in 1923 by Eugène Ysaÿe (1858–1931)
- Speech**
(video) **Judith Jaegermann**
Survivor of Neuengamme concentration camp
- Music** **Le Chant des Partisans**
The "Song of the Partisans" was popularized in 1943 by Anna Marly, a Russian exile living in London. At the suggestion of the resistance fighter Emmanuel d'Astier, French lyrics were written for the originally Russian song by the journalist Joseph Kessel and the novelist Maurice Druon. The song is an appeal to join the life-and-death struggle for the liberation of France. It was broadcast on French-language BBC programmes and the lyrics were printed in underground newspapers, leading it to become the anthem of the French Résistance.
- Speech** **Katrin Duerinckx**
Board member of the Amicale Belge de Neuengamme and the NCPGR Meensel-Kiezegem '44

Music

Die Moorsoldaten

This song was written in 1933 by political prisoners in the Börgermoor concentration camp in the Emsland region. According to the composer Rudi Goguel, the piece was written "as a deliberate protest song by the resistance fighters against the oppressors to publicly demonstrate our higher morals compared to the bestiality of the SS."

Musical accompaniment provided by the State Youth Music School Hamburg: **Cedric Greiner** (violin) and **Jamie Freeman** (tenor), with support from **Lydia Schmidl** (accordion).

This will be followed by the wreath-laying ceremony at the former detention bunker.

Musical accompaniment: **Samantha Wright** (clarinet)

Oliver von Wrochem

Dear Helga Melmed and Barbara Piotrowska, as our guests of honour I would like to welcome you both first,

and I also want to extend greetings to Judith Jägermann from Israel, who unfortunately cannot be here today but whose speech we will hear later.

Dear President Veit of the Hamburg Parliament,

dear Ms. Bering, Deputy Head of Office at the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media,

dear Ms. Duerinckx, Board member of the Amicale Belge des Neuengamme and the NCPGR Meensel-Kiezegem '44,

dear representatives of the Bundestag, the Senate, the Hamburg Parliament and the consular corps,

I am also delighted that delegations from the membership associations of the Amicale Internationale and family members of former prisoners have travelled here from Belgium, Czechia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine, the UK and the USA.

I additionally want to welcome everyone providing musical accompaniment for our ceremony today,

and to express my warmest thanks in advance to all the employees who have made the programme for our commemoration on 3 May possible.

Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

every year on the anniversary of the end of the war and the liberation, we commemorate all of the recently deceased former prisoners of Neuengamme, whose deaths we learned of in the past 12 months. At the same time, we commemorate everyone who suffered in the Neuengamme concentration camp and its satellite camps. I will read out their names:

Livia Fränkel, Dita Kraus, Lilian Sulkovitz.

There are very few survivors of the concentration camps still living. I am therefore all the more pleased that two of them, Helga Melmed and Barbara Piotrowska, can be here today, and a third, Judith Jägermann, has recorded words of welcome for us.

These three know from personal experience what it is like to live in a world in which universal values and fundamental human rights no longer apply.

The defeat of Nazi Germany and the development of international law after 1945 allowed many people to believe in the possibility of a world in which all people can live in dignity.

Many of you here today, from near and far, are working to create such a world.

I thank you for this from the bottom of my heart. Please do not let your commitment waver!

Ladies and gentlemen,

at the start of 2026, I firmly resolved to remain optimistic and positive despite the challenges facing us worldwide and in Germany, which are also affecting memorials. But the Iranian regime's massacres of protesters and the subsequent war of aggression against Iran dealt another heavy blow to the universal acknowledgement of basic and human rights. Other conflicts that have gone on for years also show that systems of international law are increasingly losing their binding force.

The geopolitical and historical-political shifts are clear to see. In many countries around the world, the destruction of the state separation of powers, the weakening of social institutions and democratic processes, the erosion of the state under the rule of law, and alliances between oligarchs and populists have further escalated in the past twelve months.

In view of the reinvigoration of authoritarian thinking and action, memorials dedicated to remembering the injustices of the National Socialists must confront the question of how their work can continue to have a social impact by teaching people about the National Socialist past and encouraging the development of a critical awareness of history amongst as many people as possible.

One important prerequisite is that memorials must be able to work independently of political directives as they enlighten people about historical injustices and what these mean for the

present day. Particularly as memorials are increasingly being instrumentalized for historical-political purposes, I hope that this independence can continue to be guaranteed in future.

It is important to understand that memorials can only be effective if and as long as social and political stakeholders support them. In a time of social polarization, it is more important than ever to work together with groups who are striving to gear our society towards basic and human rights and who are fighting historical revisionism, antisemitism and racism.

I therefore want to take this opportunity to thank all of the state and civic individuals, groups and institutions who are working on behalf of active commemoration and for a democratic society in Hamburg and beyond. Many of them are here today.

We are currently facing challenges whose consequences are not yet foreseeable. To mention just two: far-right youth cultures are on the rise, and more and more lies about National Socialism are circulating online in images and text. In connection with this, we participated in a nationwide campaign in January which highlights the dangers of deregulated digital spaces and demands action from politicians and platforms.

Memorials at the historical sites of National Socialist injustices bear witness to the mass crimes that were committed.

They represent society as they call for worthy commemoration for the victims of persecution, and they address the actions of the majority society that made it possible for these state and social crimes to be committed in the first place.

In this time of upheaval, I believe it is important for memorials not only to foster remembrance of the fate of the victims, but also to give closer consideration to the insidious process of looking away that took place in the early days of National Socialist rule, and to the various forms of complicity – as well as to the forms of resistance and aid and the groups associated with this.

In our situation today, I believe it is critically important for families and society to engage with the causes, forms and consequences of National Socialist violence.

In order to understand how National Socialist injustice could take hold and to recognize precisely what is threatening the democratic order today, it is necessary to make the suffering of the victims visible, but also to name and analyse the actions of those in the past and present who propagate a society of inequality, establish forms of authoritarian thinking and suspend basic and human rights.

For us as a foundation dedicated to enlightening society about the crimes of the National Socialists, this entails becoming active in important social arenas – including companies, sporting clubs and fan groups, political organizations, and within families and schools – to inform people about the fate of the victims of persecution and how society was involved and complicit in the National Socialist regime, as well as to raise awareness of the dangers of dismantling democratic values in the present day.

We can only successfully counter the rise in antisemitism and antiziganism, racism, hatred and incitement if we understand their causes and efficacy in the past and present and make them a topic of discussion themselves, without shying away from explaining that violent language is a prerequisite for violent actions.

Let us stand up for a democratic coexistence, for compassion and a values-driven dialogue while remaining optimistic – in our daily lives, our families, our circles of friends, at work, in our leisure time and in the political sphere.

I am grateful that so many of you are here today, and I am especially thankful for the attendance of so many descendants of victims of persecution who stand firmly by our side.

I would now like to hand it over to the President of the Hamburg Parliament.

Translation: Jessica Spengler

Carola Veit

Maria Bering

President Veit (Präsidentin der Bürgerschaft der Freien und Hansestadt Hamburg),

Ms Duerinckx (Vorstandsmitglied der Amicale Belge des Neuengamme und der NCPGR Meensel-Kiezegegem '44),

Professor von Wrochem (Vorstand der Stiftung Hamburger Gedenkstätten und Lernorte und Leiter der KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme),

and above all:

Dear Ms Jaegerman, dear Ms Melmed, dear Ms Piotrowska, dear relatives,

ladies and gentlemen,

"To forget is to betray." – These are the words of Hanna Levy-Hass, a survivor of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Short and poignant, they emphasise the importance of remembering and commemorating the victims of the Nazi regime, not only today but also in the future. Remembering not just the number of victims in their incomprehensible magnitude, but the individuals, their fates and identities, which were taken from them by the Nazi regime.

Eyewitnesses to the Nazi regime are still essential in helping us not to forget – even when we might be tempted to. They bring history to life through personal accounts, conversations and written and filmed testimonies.

In my role with the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, I have had the honour of meeting numerous survivors of the former concentration camps and many relatives of those who were persecuted. These encounters have always been deeply moving. They make us realise that remembering the victims of the Nazi regime is about more than just the government or society fulfilling their responsibility to address the legacy of Nazi crimes.

Because first and foremost, this is about people. People who have endured unimaginable suffering. It is about their dignity. And about the respect they deserve for their strength in coming to terms with their suffering. We cannot take for granted that survivors talk about their experiences and their emotions. Many find it too painful to talk about what they endured, even with their own

families, let alone in public. This makes these encounters all the more powerful. We are immensely grateful for your courage and your strength.

We are also grateful to the relatives of the victims and survivors. You are able to talk about how you have dealt with the fate of your parents, grandparents and other relatives. Your experiences show that the impact of the Nazi era was not limited to the past. It can still be felt today – certainly by the survivors and their descendants but also by society as a whole. You help us to somehow "comprehend" how deep the wounds of the Nazi dictatorship are: they span generations and will continue to have an impact on our society for a long time to come.

Members of the first and second generations, as well as the generation of grandchildren and great-grandchildren, have travelled from all over the world to the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial for today's event to commemorate the victims and ensure that their memory lives on. By being here, you give remembrance a voice and a face, but above all, a future.

We are all faced with the challenge of finding new ways to educate and reach out to the young generation in particular. Digital channels are now an essential means of communicating important messages. The Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial has been very active in this area for many years. The staff of the memorial site have demonstrated great creativity and expertise in launching a variety of social media initiatives and have created an exemplary digital remembrance game called "Erinnern. Die Kinder vom Bullenhuser Damm", which translates as "Remembrance. The children of Bullenhuser Damm". The game has been very well received, particularly among young people, which shows that you are on the right track.

The Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media does not only provide institutional support for the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial. Under the KulturInvest programme and the Federal Government's policy paper on memorials, funding has also been provided for the restoration and reconstruction of historical buildings of the former concentration camp as well as for the redesigning of the permanent exhibition. This enables the memorial site to use new, contemporary approaches in their educational work.

Nowadays, Germany has a diverse culture of remembrance. Remembrance and addressing the legacy of our history are part of our democratic identity. Last November, the Federal Cabinet adopted the Federal Government's new policy paper on memorials. The successful update of the policy paper, which is currently being implemented, represents the Federal Government's

commitment to a diverse and innovative federal landscape of memorial sites that has a broad societal impact.

The policy paper sets out how the Federal Government can support the federal states in funding memorial sites of national importance, such as the Neuengamme Concentration Camp Memorial. Project funding has been restructured in order to support initiatives aimed at the preservation of historical sites, digital remembrance and applied research. New digital education formats are needed so that memorial sites can counter rampant historical revisionism more effectively, drawing on grounded knowledge and the power of remembrance of violence and injustice.

At the same time, historical buildings must be preserved. The updated policy paper on memorials also reflects the Federal Government Commissioner's commitment to and support for the work of the memorial sites.

We must not forget. We will not forget. We have a responsibility to foster new approaches to education and outreach, ensuring that the memory remains alive and its lessons are passed on to future generations. Let us continue on this path together.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Judith Jaegermann

Welcome. My name is Judith Jaegermann.

I was born in the Czech Republic, in the city of Karlsbad [*Karlovy Vary*], in the Sudeten region. My parents had a lovely restaurant there, and the same guests visited us every year since it is a spa town.

I was the youngest of three girls. Esther was fourteen years older than me, and Ruth was one year older than me. I was the smallest. I loved dolls. I was very fond of them. I was a happy child.

We celebrated the Sukkot in the autumn. My Papa asked me to come into the courtyard with him to help him set up the hut nicely. I was happy to help him. I made the decorations, and my Papa built the hut, and it was fun. And suddenly, as he was building it, stones came flying at us, they came from above. And I asked: 'Papa, what's that?' He said: 'Stones that people are throwing at us because we are Jews and they do not like us.' And I said: 'Come, Papa, come, let's go home.' And he took me by the hand and we went home. I ran to my dolls and told them that people had thrown stones at us.

My sister Esther, who was already grown up at the time, said to Papa: 'Papa, we have to leave here. We have to emigrate to Palestine because a war is going to break out here.' Papa didn't believe it. He was an optimist and did not believe it. He said to Esther: 'It will pass. This wave of antisemitism will pass and war will not break out.' But she was right. She went with a youth group on a ship to Palestine.

We stayed, and the times got worse and worse. Then one day the Germans came to Prague, they invaded and occupied Prague. Every Jew was given a star, a yellow star here with the word 'Jew' inside it, and it had to be sewn on firmly, with needle and thread. Even I received this star as a child, and it was very unpleasant and very humiliating. But we did it. And in school – I was already going to school, I was between six and seven years old – they threw stones at me there, too, and tree branches. They tore off the branches and hit us, the Jewish children, all the way home. When I got home, I cried, and my Mama said: 'You can't go to school anymore if they hit you like that.' It was a hard time, a very hard time.

In every house you saw a swastika and slogans: 'Jews are mice' and 'Jews, go to Palestine'. And on every restaurant were the words 'Jews are not welcome here', and we were no longer allowed

to go to the cinema, and Jews could no longer work. A Jewish doctor could no longer be a doctor, and a Jew could not take on any work at all anymore. So, we wore the stars, and on every restaurant were the words 'Jews out, no Jews wanted here'. And they smeared us terribly.

There were advertisements showing a Jew with a big nose, a hooked nose and a lot of money. Caricatures were made of it, and it was a hard time. And suddenly Jews were also no longer allowed to go to school. All work had to be given up. Not even a seamstress could sew anymore, and no labourer could work. Doctors could no longer work as doctors, and it was a hard time, and people sat at home and just listened to the news.

One day there was talk about the Jews being sent to Theresienstadt. That was a ghetto not far from Prague. They picked us up in lorries and threw us onto the lorry like parcels. And they took us to a museum that had functioned as a museum until then. They had turned it into an assembly place for Jews before they were sent away.

I was the youngest. We had to stand for roll call there, and it was not at all easy. One week passed and then they took us to the train station, shoved us into the carriages. They were livestock wagons, of course. And we travelled for a long time.

We arrived in Theresienstadt. It was a ghetto with a Jewish self-administration. There were no SS men there yet. There was a Jewish self-administration, and women and men and children were separated. Ruth and I were placed in a children's home. I was very unhappy in the children's home because I wasn't with my Mama, I was with my sister Ruth. I cried a lot. One day I decided to look for Mama, and I left the children's home and looked for Mama, but I could not find her.

I met an older woman who asked: 'Why are you crying like that, my child?' And I said: 'I don't know where my Mama is. I'm in the children's home now.' 'Come, I'll show you where your Mama is, since I know where the Czech women are staying.' She took me by the hand and walked with me, and we found the building where my Mama was staying. She said: 'You'll find your Mama here.' I said: 'Thank you very much.' She continued on, and I opened the door and called: 'Mama!'

My Mama was inside. She heard me and came out and hugged me. 'Where are you all?' she asked. I said: 'We're in the children's home, but I want to be with you.' 'Come, come, come in.' And she took me by the hand and led me into a small room where she was staying with twelve other women on mattresses. She said: 'This is my young daughter, I hope you have nothing

against it if I keep her here.' And all the women welcomed me very warmly, and luckily I stayed with Mama.

But there were many illnesses in the ghetto, and I fell sick, too. It was an inflammation of the nervous system. I was very ill. I had fever, and the doctor took me and brought me to what was called a sick bay, where all the children with the illness were lying, and I was unhappy again here. The doctor said: 'You'll be healthy soon' and 'Pull yourself together, you'll be with your Mama again soon.' And one day when I no longer had fever, he sent me to Mama and I was very happy.

Ruth had found us, too, and sixteen months passed in Theresienstadt when they told us we were being sent to be gassed. We had never heard that before. We had never even heard the word Auschwitz. But they took us, and a transport was put together, and we had to go to Auschwitz by train. We met our Papa again there, thank God. And we were happy together. But then they separated the women again and separated the men again, so it was very, very sad yet again.

We were there for nine months, and one day Dr Mengele came into the hut looking for twins. We had a pair of twins, and they came forward immediately: 'We're twins'. He took them with him and we never saw them again. We never heard anything about gassing, but he did experiments on the twins, and we never saw them again.

After nine months, they organized another transport which took us to Hamburg¹ to carry out clearance work. That was very hard. That was a hard time. Every woman was handed a shovel with the shovel facing upwards, and we always walked into the so-called city, where everything was already bombed. We worked hard, scooping up stones or sometimes shovelling snow in winter. It was a hard time.

After another nine months, they sent us to Bergen-Belsen, but on foot. All we saw there were the dead. Everyone was lying on the ground in the camp. It was 15 April when a tank with a British soldier came into the camp, and he said: 'Kids, you are free. We are the British.'

We could not believe it. We could not believe it. We were very happy, but another terrible disease broke out, typhus, which we all caught. We were all deathly ill and many died. But the three of us stayed alive. I thank God for that. And on 15 April they sent us to Prague, and that's where

¹ As far as we currently know, Judith Jaegermann was deported in July 1944 from Auschwitz to Hamburg, to the Dessauer Ufer, Neugraben and Tiefstack satellite camps of Neuengamme. She was sent to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in April 1945, where she was liberated. We assume that Judith Jaegermann is referring in this passage to her experiences in the Neugraben satellite camp.

we heard there was a ship for children going to Palestine. Mama registered me for it right away, and one day I arrived in Israel, where I started a new family.

Translation: Jessica Spengler

Katrin Duerinckx

Dear guests,

I would like to warmly welcome you to this commemoration.

My name is Katrin Duerinckx. I am the granddaughter of Ferdinand Duerinckx, and it is through him that I am connected to Neuengamme.

Ferdinand Duerinckx arrived at the Neuengamme concentration camp at the beginning of September 1944. His stay here would last only a few months. On December 18th, 1944, he died in the Neuengamme camp. He was only 34 years old.

How did all of this happen?

His story begins in Meensel-Kiezegem, a small village in central Belgium, near Leuven. During the war, life in this rural village remained relatively calm. There was resistance, and there were collaborators. My grandfather was a schoolteacher in the village and a member of the resistance movement NKB.

Most young men in the village went into hiding to escape forced labor in Germany. My grandfather also sheltered men in hiding. In the village, there was a Canadian pilot, Teddy Blenkinsop, who had been shot down and was taken in by the resistance, waiting in Meensel for his return to his troops.

Although collaborating families openly supported the enemy, resistance and collaboration largely left each other alone. Until July 30th, 1944.

On that day, Gaston Merckx, the son of a collaborating family, was shot by resistance fighters from Leuven. The victim's mother wanted revenge and said: "One hundred hostages will die for this." But since Meensel-Kiezegem was a small village with fewer than 1,000 inhabitants, this was an extremely heavy demand for retaliation.

And so, on August 1st, 1944, a first raid took place. Three people were shot on the spot, and 14 others, including my grandfather, were arrested and taken to the Gestapo office in Leuven. On August 11, a second, much larger raid was carried out. The village was surrounded by 350 men, every house was searched one by one, and another 81 men and women were arrested and

taken to Leuven. During this raid, they also searched for the Canadian pilot Blenkinsop, and the farm where he was believed to be hiding was set on fire. The owner of the farm died in the flames.

The raids in Meensel-Kiezegeg were carried out not only by the Wehrmacht, but also by Flemish collaborators and Flemish SS members.

At the end of August 1944, my grandfather, together with 70 other villagers, was transported to Germany. Knowing that Leuven was liberated on September 4, 1944, these events become even more harrowing.

From the train, my grandfather managed to throw out a note with the following message: "On our way to Germany, unknown destination, all in good health. We hope to return soon. Pray for a good and swift journey home."

Miraculously, my grandmother received this note. However, it was the last sign of life that the women and children who were left behind ever received from their husbands and fathers.

All the deported villagers from Meensel-Kiezegeg ended up in the Neuengamme concentration camp. Several were transferred to subcamps such as Meppen, Bremen-Blumenthal, Lübeck, Brunswick, Wöbbelin, Schandelah, and Bergen-Belsen. Like all prisoners, they were forced into slave labor in clay pits, brickworks, and the arms industry. Many died quickly from exhaustion, disease, hunger, and abuse.

Of the 71 deported villagers, only 8 men returned. One of them even survived the Cap Arcona disaster.

The small village of Meensel-Kiezegeg was left in mourning, with 44 widows and 112 war orphans; women without husbands, children without fathers.

To ensure that the tragedy of Meensel-Kiezegeg is not forgotten, a large commemoration is held every year in the village between August 1st and 11th. We must never forget what happened, not in Meensel-Kiezegeg during the raids, and certainly not in Neuengamme and all the other concentration camps. It remains vitally important to learn from what went so terribly wrong in the past.

Especially in the uncertain world we live in today, it is more necessary than ever to cherish the free world we live in, a world for which so many people gave their lives. Including my grandfather.

We must keep the memory of the victims alive. I also want to keep the memory of my grandfather alive. For more than 20 years, a commemorative trip has been organized from Meensel-Kiezezem to Neuengamme. Many participants, like myself, come here to remember their fathers, grandfathers, uncles... and to be in the place where they suffered and died.

Commemoration in Neuengamme also takes place at the monument of Meensel-Kiezezem in the park. The sculpture, "The Despair of Meensel-Kiezezem," depicts a grieving mother, with only a child left in the house, a home without a husband, without a father. This piece of Meensel-Kiezezem within the Neuengamme grounds gives us the opportunity to hold a ceremony here every year and lay a wreath in honor of the victims.

In 2019, a new museum, "Museum44," was established in Meensel-Kiezezem. There, visitors can discover the full story of the local tragedy and, hopefully, reflect critically on the events and the spirit of that time. This story must not be lost, because if we forget, it will happen again.

My grandfather was only 34 years old when he died in Neuengamme. My grandmother, Maria Janssens, was left behind with five young children. The oldest was seven years old, and the youngest not even four months. When my grandfather was arrested, my grandmother was heavily pregnant. Before he was transported to Germany, their youngest child, Freddy, was born. He never knew his father. My grandfather never got to see his youngest son.

My father, Jef, who was five years old when his father was taken away, still speaks about him often. Even now, at the age of 86, the loss remains. At the same time, we are deeply grateful for and proud of our grandmother. Like the other widows in the village, she faced life with strength and ensured that her children grew up to be happy and good people.

Although my grandfather has a symbolic grave in Meensel, unfortunately Neuengamme is his true resting place. As his ashes were scattered on the site of the concentration camp when he died.

This is where I come to visit him, as often as I can. That is why I stand here today: to remember him, to honor him, and to thank him. After all, he gave his life in the path toward a free world in which I have been able to grow up.

Thank you.

Susann Lewerenz

Dear guests,

we have come to the end of the commemoration ceremony here in the former Walther factory. We will now move on to the wreath-laying ceremony at the former detention bunker. Please turn right when you leave the building, our employees will show you the way.

Thank you very much.

Translation: Jessica Spengler