

Commemorative speech on the November pogroms 2000 in the Vöhler Synagogue

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Those who want peace must prepare for peace!

Si vis pacem para pacem!

This is the consequence of the unimaginable consequences of war and violence when we look at the last 110 years – that is, from 1910 to the present day.

If we look at the development of the period from 1910 onwards, we realize that what was unimaginable at the beginning of the 20th century quickly developed into a catastrophic conflagration throughout the world. The message of peace – for example that of the first Nobel Peace Prize laureate Bertha von Suttner 1905: „The next war will be of a dread like none of his predecessors.“, remained unheard.

Bertha von Suttner also said:

'Those who can't hear the victims screaming, can't see shrug, but who, once they're out of sight and hearing range, don't care that they're screaming.'

My question: Are we out of earsight today, do we no longer see and hear the screaming and twitching of the tortured, tortured, murdered people in the extermination camps of the National Socialists?

But also Pope Francis' prayer can help us on the road to peace. The prayer he prayed on the occasion of the visit of the President of the State of Israel, Shimon Peres, and the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas at the Vatican on Sunday, June 8, 2014.

"Lord, God of peace, hear our supplication!

Many times and over many years we have tried to resolve our conflicts with our forces and also with our weapons; so many moments of hostility and darkness; so much shed blood; so many broken lives; so many buried hopes ... But our efforts were in vain. Well, Lord, help us! Do you give us peace, teach us peace, lead us to peace! Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say, 'Never again war! Everything is destroyed with the war!' Give us the courage to do concrete deeds to build peace. Lord, God of Abraham and the Prophets, You God of Love, who you created us and call us to live as brothers, give us the strength to be builders of peace every day; Give us the ability to see with benevolent eyes all the people we meet on our way. Get ready to listen to the cry of our citizens asking us to turn our weapons into instruments of peace, our fears of trust, and our tensions in forgiveness. Keep the flame of hope burning in us, so that we may make decisions for dialogue and reconciliation with patient perseverance, so that peace may finally prevail. And may these words —division, hatred, war—be banished from the hearts of every human being! Lord, disarm the tongue and hands, renew hearts and minds, so that the word that makes us meet

each other always be ‚brother‘ and our lives find expression in ‚Shalom, Peace, Salam‘!
Amen."

Personally, this prayer by the Pope is an incentive for me to work for peace and to ask our Lord God to give me the strength to do so.

Yes, let us look deliberately at the original catastrophe of the 20th century, the First World War; let us look at the cruel Second World War; let us look at the Korean War, the Vietnamese War, but also at the wars, which today are claiming daily human sacrifices in many parts of the world. In Mali in Afghanistan, in eastern Ukraine, but also in Nagorno-Karabakh!

Now we could ask: why can't we live together peacefully in this world, why do we have to fight our conflicts bloody, why do we not learn from history. And now I'm saying something that has been around me for many years. What can I do, what can we, each and every one of us do with regard to the wars in the world? I experience the famous shrug with many people. I shrug at this shrug: let us look closely at the brutal consequences of war and violence in the past; but let us also look at our supposedly so peaceful life, let us look at our families, in our associations, in our schools, in our political communities. Yes, let us look around in our immediate environment. Everywhere is envy, is confrontation, which very often touches the dignity of the human being. And now I maintain that this world will become more peaceful if each of us does not refer to the immutable great conflicts of this world, but creates the peace that is possible very small in its immediate surroundings. I maintain, and this is life-defining for me, that if we all work in our immediate environment for peace, then the world becomes more peaceful.

The motto of the Volksbund German war grave care, which was coined in 1953 by young people, eight years after the Second World War with its 55 million dead, at the first large international youth camp at the Lommel war grave site in Belgium: "Work for Peace - Reconciliation over the Graves" determines the peace education work of the People's League. This is based on the memory of the terrible consequences of war and violence.

Today, in the synagogue of Vöhl, in front of the Torah curtain, we think of the horrific events of 9 November 1938 and the murder of Jews in the Holocaust, which was then committed with all the brutality of popular anger – also here in Waldecker Land – by German people, by citizens, by neighbours. There were not antisocial people, people like you and I acting, blinded and brainless by propaganda.

My generation, I was born in 1938, so I still have memories of war events – it can no longer be questioned any time soon, so it is so important that we create places of remembrance, places like this former synagogue or the Gustav Hüneberg House in Volkmarsen. For me, as a leader of the People's League, historically reclaimed war grave sites are places where we can make clear the consequences of war and violence.

Finally, a thought:

Neonational socialism is on the rise: today it shows itself in statements such as "Hitler and the Nazis are only a bird's-eye shot in over 1000 years of successful German history ",

or the demand for a "remembrance-political turnaround of 180 degrees", which means to look positively at the time of National Socialism.

It is these basic attitudes, ladies and gentlemen, that poison the well and aim at a mood that will finally lead to Halle, Hanau and the assassination of upright democrats such as our revered President Of The Government, Dr Walter Lübcke.

What do we need to do:

We must develop strategies against right-wing extremism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. We must translate these into political and social action at all levels.

We must publicly stand up for cultural diversity and tolerance

We must fight right-wing extremism aggressively.

How did our Federal President comment on the demonstrations in Berlin on 30 August 2020:

"Our democracy is alive," Steinmeier stressed. Anyone who is annoyed or questioned about the Corona measures can do so, even in public, even in demonstrations. "My understanding ends where demonstrators are stretched in front of the carts of enemies of democracy and political incitement. Those who seek to join forces with right-wing extremists on the streets, but also those who walk indifferently alongside neo-Nazis, xenophobes and anti-Semites, who do not clearly and actively distinguish themselves, make themselves in common with them." So spoke our President!

Ladies and gentlemen

we must – and I say this with a hot heart – introduce young people to questions such as how we formulate them on commemorative days such as 9 November and make it clear to them what blindness does.

In doing so, we should focus on Article 1 (1) of our Basic Law as the supreme maxim of our action: "The dignity of man is inviolable".