

Speech by Ambassador Christoph Retzlaff on the occasion of the 75th Holocaust Remembrance Day

Accra, 27 January 2020

On this day 27 January 1945, 75 years ago, the concentration camp of Auschwitz was liberated. The world began to fully understand the full scale of horror of the Shoah. More than 6 million Jews had been murdered. For all times, the Holocaust will stand as an unparalleled crime against humanity, as a total breakdown of the most basic values of humanity.

It is not only the numbers we should remember, it is each and every individual. So many lives, young and old, were lost. They are missing. Something is missing to all of us. This loss is irreversible. It is a wound that will not heal. The memory of all the crimes, the persecution, the murder of Jews will therefore always carry this pain, the pain of what was destroyed and never came into being.

Germany, the country I represent, has assumed the moral responsibility for the deeds of our ancestors. The megalomaniac project of the murder of all Jews may have been the fruit of Hitler's sick brain, but it was put into practice with deadly precision by many. And even more looked away, did not want to know. How could in the immediate neighborhood of the city of Weimar – home to Goethe, Schiller, Johann Sebastian Bach – how could right next door hell open its gates in the concentration camp Buchenwald?

How? Why? There is no satisfactory answer to this question.

There is no escaping this past.

The pain, the shame, the responsibility growing from it – all is part of our identity, of the basic understanding of our German state and it belongs to the core tenet of our constitution. Our pain is enshrined in its first sentence:

“Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.”

Dear guests,

It comes close to a miracle that today relations between Jewish communities across the world and Germany are close and trustful. It comes close to a miracle that Israel and Germany call each other partners and friends. And we are grateful that the Jewish community in Germany is thriving and growing. Synagogues are being built, Rabbis ordained, Jewish schools opened.

While we are grateful for all these positive developments – we cannot be satisfied. Still, synagogues are guarded by police in Germany. Still, we read of anti-Semitic attacks against our Jewish citizens. And just a couple of months ago, a sick mind attacked the Synagogue in the town of Halle. It was only by chance that nobody was hurt. It sometimes seems as if the old evil tries to come back in new disguise.

Never must we allow us to be complacent, to shrug and say: „Well, there always are a few crazy people...“. We have made the painful experience that it always starts with a few...

That is why our attitude must be one of Zero-tolerance when facing anti-Semitism – especially in Germany, but in Europe and the world as a whole.

Allow me to close on a more general remark, especially for our young guests today. You may ask what is the relevance for me in Ghana?

Well, we are living in challenging times. The core values of our democracies and sometimes also our humanity are under pressure, even under attack. From the outside, but also from within. Nationalistic, xenophobic and anti-semitic forces are on the rise in many countries.

Let us be aware of this! Let us never again embark on a path that pits one country, one people against another and preaches that our victory can only grow from the defeat of the other. This is also your responsibility as the young generation.

The lesson for all of us must be: Never again!