

*Remarks by German Consul-General Dr. Wolfgang Vorwerk
at the Holocaust Commemoration Service for Yom HaShoah on May 14, 2006*

Honored survivors of the Holocaust,
Members of the Jewish Community,
Mayor and Mrs. Menino,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Children,

On this day on which we commemorate the victims of the Holocaust,

on this day on which we pay tribute to you, the survivors and their families,

I bow my head before you all to bear witness of and express my shame for the deaths of those millions, murdered by Germans, on German orders, at German hands.

In your moving account, Israel Arbeiter, you told of sufferings we cannot even imagine.

The tragedy of the Jews in Europe was unparalleled, without comparison or precedent.

More than anyone, we Germans must remember the Holocaust and pass your memory on to our children.

But we have now reached a critical point in time, when the legacy of one generation is being handed down to the next.

The day will come when everything depends on our talking about the past, on our describing and recalling it - without the benefit of you, survivors, contemporary witnesses.

Each in his own way, as Lois Lowry has so magnificently done in her keynote speech today.

The day will come when we need living remembrance that can engage hearts and minds.

Remembrance like Steven Spielberg's moving documentary of interviews with Holocaust survivors, produced for the Shoa Foundation.

A documentary which is part of the Holocaust education at many German schools, including all Schools in my home state Bavaria.

We Germans have to hand down your legacy to our sons and daughters.

We have to hand down your legacy in such a way that our children feel it is their responsibility, too, to prevent any possible repetition of the past, as former German President Roman Herzog urged already on Yom HaShoah in Bergen-Belsen in 1995.

And that is why it was so important for me to have my 18 year old son with me again today and one of his German classmates, both from Brookline High School, three young German interns from the

German Consulate, who will return to Germany in a few weeks, and a German scholar from Harvard.

It is important for me to have them with me here today because they stand – as all young people in their age - next in line to pass on to their children what they have heard from survivors about the Holocaust, to pass on the torch that keeps the flame of memory alive, to safeguard your legacy for the next generations.

It is important because these young people – third generation – stand next in line to assume responsibility for the consequences of the past:

Responsibility not for the Holocaust and what happened over 60 years ago, but responsibility, to make sure that what led up to those monstrous crimes, the Holocaust, will never again be allowed to take root and flourish.

That is why it is so important that these young people have a clear understanding of what happened.

That is why it is so important that we Germans of the older generation are honest with our children.

Honesty is essential for true and lasting remembrance.

Such honesty means for us Germans that we talk frankly about political and moral failures. It means we talk about crimes, crimes against humanity, about the Shoah.

We Germans have to teach it to our children – more than anyone – in all honesty.

We must teach our children never to give totalitarianism the slightest chance. Preventing it means preventing whatever could prepare the ground for it. It must be nipped in the bud before it can take root – a lesson my 82 years old mother has preached us children at home at least a hundred times.

It was pure self-delusion when politicians in 1933 thought they could both use Hitler and tame him.

We have to teach our children that the Holocaust cannot simply be blamed on “a demonic Hitler”, as former Chancellor Schroeder correctly said in a speech to survivors in Auschwitz-Birkenau last year.

The evil did not begin with Hitler but before. There was a tradition, a mindset that paved the way for Hitler. And the people at that time supported him.

We must teach our children to fight anti-Semitism as soon as it raises its head. Right away, from the beginning.

When Holocaust deniers stand up, as recently the Iranian President, we have to speak up, and take a clear position as the international community has done.

Holocaust denial is the greatest indignity human beings can inflict on survivors and their families, on the families of the victims and on the victims themselves.

We must not remain silent when anti-semitic groups are using the modern globe-encompassing means of communication, the Internet, satellite television, to disseminate their outrageous ideas. Israel Arbeiter, you can count on us. We will not remain silent.

Survivors, you have called on us to be vigilant, to remember, to understand and work for a better future. Your call, Israel Arbeiter, is being heard.

And I do not say it just because I am the German Consul General - your call is being heard by these young Germans here.

It has always been above all the younger generation in Germany that put the searching questions to their teachers and parents. How was it possible that the Holocaust could happen? How could people, how could our people be capable of such evil? How was it possible for our nation to so profoundly betray humanity.?

Many young people in Germany, private, local initiatives try to live up to the grave legacy left by their forefathers:

Initiatives, aimed at researching the history of their communities, their people's own home towns during the Third Reich, initiatives, finding out what happened to their Jewish inhabitants, initiatives, aimed at memorializing the Jewish culture that once existed in their communities.

But initiatives aimed as well at combating extremism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia to ensure that such terrible injustice and suffering as over 60 years ago is never repeated.

Yes there are right wing activities in Germany, but let me assure you: We do not look the other way this time. We do not pretend we do not hear. We do not pretend we do not see and know. When neo-nazis stand up as they have done in my home town last year, then we do hear and we do see and we do know and we do act.

Thank you very much.