

Statement by Ambassador Christoph Heusgen German Permanent Representative to the United Nations

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to first greet all the Holocaust survivors here in the room and in particular Ms. Shashar and Mr. Milstein. We are humbled and honored to have you here. Your strength inspires us.

Excellencies,

President of the General Assembly,

Secretary-General,

Distinguished Guests,

When the German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Auschwitz-Birkenau in December, she voiced her shame for the unspeakable crimes committed in this German Nazi concentration camp whose 75th year of liberation we mark today.

I too am ashamed standing in front of you today, knowing that it was Germans – my countrymen and countrywomen – who were responsible for the complete breakdown of civilization and the barbaric descent into systematic murder, preceded by incomprehensible cruelty.

It is therefore not evident that I, the German Permanent Representative to the United Nations, should be given the opportunity to speak here today.

And yet, at the same time, I feel deeply thankful to be able to do so. On the one hand, it is testament to the reconciliation and trust-building that has allowed Germany to once again become part of the international community.

On the other hand, and more importantly, today's commemoration allows Germany to join you in remembering the millions of victims of the Nazi regime.

And we do remember the six million Jews, the Sinti and Roma, the disabled persons, LGBTI persons, the forced laborers and all others who were stripped of their dignity and made to suffer under the German Nazi regime all across Europe.

We also remember the relatives who lived on after the Holocaust with the agonizing scars inflicted by hate, and I also pay tribute to their strength.



Ambassador Christoph Heusgen, German Permanent Representative to the United Nations.
Photo: UN Photo/Evan Schneider

When Germany takes the Chair of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance this year, we hope to play our part in keeping the millions of memories alive for generations to come and to learn from history.

I also invite you to join us tomorrow in opening an exhibition downstairs, in this building, about the first generation of Holocaust researchers who were instrumental in recording the atrocities and shining a light on the German perpetrators.

Yet, we understand, as our Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier said last week at Yad Vashem, that there is a real danger that we Germans understand our history better than we do our

present.

And indeed, we cannot deny that anti-Semitism is on the rise again. Just last year, on Yom Kippur, a man attacked a synagogue in the German town of Halle. Thankfully, the door of the synagogue held. Sadly, however, the perpetrator went on to murder two others. And this is just one example from my country.

Let me quote the Holocaust survivor Rabbi Schneier whose Shabbat service I had the honor to attend on Saturday morning. I quote “anti-Semitism is a cancer that was in remission but now has metastasized.”

Excellencies, Distinguished Guests,

Please accept that we will do all in our power to counter a renewed

rise of anti-Semitism in Germany and in the world. We will protect Jewish life and we will stand by Israel. This is our highest duty and part of our national identity and it is part of our commitment to democracy and human rights.

Sadly, as we know, such values are under attack from all sides. Bigotry and hatred abound – both online and offline. Leaders and political systems guarantee their political survival by trampling on human dignity.

This is unacceptable. There is a danger of “never again” becoming a hollow phrase, and Germany works tirelessly to prevent it from becoming one. We do this in Germany with youth education, for example, through an initiative called “Youth Remembers.”

And I agree with the Israeli Ambassador who just highlighted the need for education, and I support all the proposals made that all schoolchildren in Germany should visit the Auschwitz concentration camp. But we also do it at the international level through our membership in the Security Council and our support for global justice by way of the International Criminal Court.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, 75 years later, the Auschwitz Memorial and Museum makes the crimes visible to us by displaying the murdered children's shoes, the gas chambers, the train carriages meant for livestock but used for humans, and the photos and names of the victims.

By looking at them, we can remember the Holocaust. But these things also make us understand that we will never find words adequate enough to describe the Shoa – not even for the briefest of moments.

I pay my deepest respect to the victims.

I pay my deepest respect to the survivors and the families.

Thank you again for allowing me to be here today, to remember with you.

Thank you.