

**Speech delivered by Ambassador Felix Klein,
Federal Foreign Office Special Representative for Relations with Jewish Organizations
and Issues relating to Anti-Semitism,
at the United Nations General Assembly in New York**

**on January 27, 2016
Holocaust Remembrance Day 2016**

Your Excellency, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General,
Your Excellency, Mr. Mogens Lykketoft, President of the General Assembly,
Excellencies,
Holocaust survivors and families,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we remember the liberation of the concentration camp at Auschwitz, freed by Red Army soldiers almost 71 years ago. The mere word *Auschwitz* conjures up millions of individual stories. Each one describes in its own way incomprehensible suffering and unspeakable cruelty culminating in systematic murder. The gruesome barbarity exhibited in the mass extermination of life at Auschwitz is beyond our imagination. But we do know one thing: the unimaginable happened; it was possible. What happened at Auschwitz was a fundamental attack on what it means to be a human being, an assault on human dignity. A fanatical ideology denied people their humanity. Today we remember all the victims of the criminal ideology of National Socialism, all those who were robbed of their lives – in a material, spiritual and physical sense – and stripped of their human dignity: the persecuted, the tortured, the humiliated, the murdered. We remember the six million European Jews killed, the Sinti and Roma, the forced labourers, the prisoners of war left to starve, those euthanized by the state, the homosexuals, all those who, were persecuted for religious, political or humanitarian reasons, those who stood in opposition to the reign of terror and so fell victim to the strictures of the totalitarian Nazi regime. We also remember those who survived, those for whom the horror of that inhumanity never faded – those who, as the author Jean Améry once said, could no longer feel at home in a post-Shoa world.

We should always be mindful of the question asked by Auschwitz survivor and Nobel Peace Prize winner Elie Wiesel: “How could intelligent, educated men fire machine guns at hundreds of children by day and in the evening take pleasure in the poetry of Schiller or the music of Bach?” We can only try to imagine today what questions arose within the walls of the concentration camps. “Why? Why is no-one intervening or doing something? Where are our fellow citizens and where is the rest of the world? Has the world lost its sense of universal humanity and decency?”

Ladies and gentlemen,

Days of shared remembrance can bring societies together and help these reflect upon their histories. Like it or not, pivotal events leave a mark not only on the protagonists and witnesses but also on subsequent generations. Without a doubt the most important lesson to be learned from the Holocaust is: “Never again!” That message has become a fundamental tenet for any country that intends to live in peace with its neighbours. In Germany today, therefore, our

commitment to a united Europe is firmly rooted in our awareness of the immeasurable importance of freedom and the rule of law, pluralism and tolerance. However, these values are as fragile as they are precious. They require our constant vigilance and our committed effort. To begin with, this means exposing old and new prejudices and stereotypes for what they are. The attacks in Paris showed the world once again how dangerous ideologies can spawn dreadful deeds.

The memory of our tragic history shapes how we see ourselves today. Taking frank ownership of our difficult past has been good for Germany.

Despite the fact that anti-Semitism was not invented in Germany, the Holocaust certainly was. That said, the process of properly dealing with our National Socialist past came slowly, since the prime focus after the Second World War was to rebuild and rejigger Germany's economy. During the years of the so called "economic miracle", too many in Germany looked only to the future, too few took the time to look back as well. The majority tried to avoid feeling guilt or shame, preferring not to remember. This veil of silence gradually lifted at the end of the 1950s, when prominent figures of the Nazi regime were tried for their crimes. The protests of 1968 also led people, at least in what was then West Germany, to realize that completely "normal" men and women who had been among those robbed of their humanity, their conscience and their morality by the Nazi regime. Every generation, indeed every decade has made sure of this subject matter in its own way – often in heated debate, such as those surrounding the *Historikerstreit* in the late 1980s or the Holocaust Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe next to the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin.

These debates have allowed Germany to become an active member of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance which seeks to embolden political and social support for Holocaust education, remembrance and research both nationally and internationally. We call upon other states to also cooperate with this important intergovernmental body.

Remembrance imposes a duty – the Holocaust cannot and will not be forgotten. Auschwitz reminds us each and every day that our mutual coexistence depends on our shared humanity. Auschwitz concerns all of us – today and tomorrow, not just on remembrance days and not just in countries in which the Holocaust took place. Racist ideologies that insult and disadvantage others can never be justified. Standing by while human rights are violated is repugnant and will only propagate more violence. This is particularly relevant in a time in which Europe and especially Germany is seeking consensus on how to effectively integrate varying religious and cultural traditions. Only if human dignity is respected and solidarity is upheld, will our communities flourish in peace.

Thank you, Mr. President.