

S p e e c h

by the Senator for the Interior and Sport, Andreas Geisel,
at the opening of the *Der kalte Blick. Letzte Bilder jüdischer Familien aus dem Ghetto
Tarnów 1942* (The Cold Eye. Final Pictures of Jewish Families from the Tarnów
Ghetto) exhibition
on 20 October 2020

Your Excellency, the esteemed ambassador Professor Przyłębski,
Minister Grütters,
Dr Riedle,
ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to be here with you today, and would like to pass on the regards of the governing mayor, Michael Müller, who is very sorry he could not make it.

Occasions such as these are very important to the Berlin Senate, because they make a priceless contribution to the commemorative culture of our city and our country. They provide knowledge, encourage discussion, and build bridges between the past and present.

The exhibition “The Cold Eye. Final Pictures of Jewish Families from the Tarnów Ghetto” teaches us about the history of Jews from the Polish city of Tarnów. People who were abruptly torn from their previous life as a result of the German occupation in September 1939. Who were robbed of their freedom, who had to perform forced labour and who, cooped up in the most primitive of conditions, were made into martyrs. We learn about the many who had already died of disease and malnutrition in the ghetto, and the countless others who were murdered in the extermination camps of Belzec and Auschwitz.

And we gaze into the faces of people who, as so-called *Ostjuden* or ‘Eastern Jews’, were considered ‘inferior’ according to the Nazis’ perfidious race model. People who

were effectively documented as examples of 'worthless life' in photos and mini biographies by Nazi scientists in the ghetto, and who were made to undergo so-called 'race research'.

With a 'cold look', as aptly conveyed in the exhibition's title. An exhibition that uses these old photographs and records to not only illustrate the Nazis' ruthless, inhumane outlook, but, above all, seeks to make us aware of the people's faces and history.

I thank you sincerely for this impressive exhibition, which gives us insights into the history of the Tarnów ghetto and of the people, thereby enriching our knowledge, our discussions on the politics of history, and our commemorative culture.

This is a task that, even seventy-five years after the end of World War II, remains just as important as ever. One we need to keep setting ourselves, from generation to generation. And the further time goes on, the fewer people will be around to share their personal experiences of that period, and the more important it therefore becomes to work together to find ways of actively shaping this commemorative work. Indeed, making it our own. It is a process that needs to be continued through the generations, and which requires the involvement of our entire society.

I am grateful that many people in our city are committed to keeping the commemorative culture alive, be it through *Stolperstein* memorial plaque projects, readings, city tours, or conversations with survivors, and I hope many school students will visit this exhibition too. A thriving commemorative culture strengthens our democracy and makes us more aware of the constant attempts to reinterpret or relativize our history. This is important, and can only be achieved if the commemorative culture emerges from within society itself. Not decreed by law, but rather by examining history – openly and stridently.

And not just in Germany, but right across Europe. The crimes committed by the Nazi dictatorship left traces of terror in many European countries, especially Poland.

I am very grateful that we have been able to maintain close ties with Poland for many decades. With our sister city of Warszawa (Warsaw), as well as many other cities, such

as Wrocław (*pronounced Vrotswaf*), (formerly known as Breslau), Poznań and Gdańsk. We collaborate actively in many areas of culture, including in the commemorative and remembrance culture of both our countries.

For example, State Secretary Sawsan Chebli joined high-school students from Max-von-Laue-Oberschule on a trip to Auschwitz and Krakow in spring 2019 to discuss Nazi crimes. To prepare for the trip, they had visited an exhibition right here, at the Topography of Terror.

Then, last year, we teamed up with the German Poland Institute at the Red Town Hall here in Berlin to commemorate the 80th anniversary of Germany's invasion of Poland, and in November 2019 with Warsaw mayor Rafał Trzaskowski to remember the 30th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. In August this year, the mayor of Poznań came to visit to talk about the partnership between our cities in the areas of culture, transport and equal opportunity. And just a few weeks ago, we and a delegation from Warsaw discussed the handling of the pandemic at the Senate Office for the Interior and Sport.

As you can see, ours is an intensive and varied partnership. And German-Polish relations have a defining effect every day, including in our city. This is evidenced by the over 70,000 Berliners who hold Polish passports, and the more than double this number who have Polish roots. They all help ensure our long-time sister-city partnership with Warsaw is one of vibrancy, imagination and creativity.

For this, I, along with the Berlin Senate, am very grateful, and we will continue to do everything possible to develop and strengthen these relationships.

Today, the opening of this exhibition, is one way of contributing to this. By discussing history, by learning about the past, and by remembering and commemorating.

I thank you for the impressive exhibition, and hope it attracts lots of visitors – even during these times of the coronavirus – to engage in active discussions about our history.

Thank you.