

**Speech by Minister of State Monika Grütters, Member of the German Bundestag,  
Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media,  
for the opening of the special exhibition  
“The Cold Eye: Final Pictures of Jewish Families from the Tarnów Ghetto”  
on 20 October 2020 at the Topography of Terror**

Ladies and gentlemen,

When, in the autumn of 1941, the scholars of a Nazi research institute<sup>1</sup> based in Krakow pursued a project together with the anthropology department of the University of Vienna “to research typical Eastern European Jews”, they did so with a sense of urgency.

“We don’t know what resettlement measures are planned for the Jewish population for the coming months,” the researcher Anton Plügel wrote to his colleague Dora Maria Kahlich in October 1941. “It’s possible that by waiting too long, we would squander valuable material,” he added.

The researchers expected the people whom they viewed as mere research objects to be deported soon. They did not care about these people’s fates. All that mattered, in their cold view, was the potential loss of what they regarded as “valuable” material.

That is why the exhibition that the Topography of Terror Foundation has designed together with the Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Natural History Museum Vienna is called “The Cold Eye”. It shows visitors previously unknown photographic documentation that was

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<sup>1</sup> The *Institut für Deutsche Ostarbeit*

stored in the Natural History Museum in Vienna. This collection encompasses portraits of 106 Jewish families – a total of 565 men, women and children – who were photographed in March 1942 in the German-occupied southern Polish city of Tarnów for purposes of what the Nazis called ‘racial biology’. The people were photographed under duress and in the shadow of death.

The exhibition thus offers a harrowing view of the chilling efficiency with which the Nazis put their antisemitic ideology into practice. It was not only administrative officials, lawyers, doctors, business people and – yes – artists who carried out such deeds. As the exhibition demonstrates, it was also scholars, who through the purported scientific “objectivity” of their research – and with a brutally cold eye to their fellow human beings – helped to legitimise genocide.

It is important that this exhibition reminds us of the immense suffering of people in Poland under German occupation during the Second World War. For this I thank everyone who contributed to the exhibition, and especially you, Dr Berner, and your curatorial team. In this way, the 106 Jewish families from Tarnów in the portraits can be regarded in the way that every human being deserves: with warmth, appreciation and hopefully affection.

Exhibitions like this one have – like memorial sites and other places that document the past – the power to move people to look and listen, and to heighten their powers of judgment in the face of overpowering guilt and unprecedented suffering. They make an important contribution to ensuring that the seeds of totalitarian ideologies contemptuous of humanity never find fertile soil to take root again.

That is why I am so pleased that this exhibition could receive funding from the Federal Government’s cultural budget (the Capital Cultural Fund in Berlin).

Supporting memorial sites and other places of learning related to the Nazi regime is an important priority for the Federal Government: in 2020 alone, a total of more than 26 million euro is available for institutional funding and project support. With this support, we want to raise awareness of the developments that once led to antisemitism, racism and marginalisation; to war and annihilation; and to violence and repression.

For even after three quarters of a century, it remains just as important as ever to grapple with the Nazi era, as the cowardly attempted murder of members of a Jewish congregation in Halle almost exactly a year ago reminds us. It is bitter and unbearable that more than 75 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, 1,800 antisemitic crimes are committed each year; that Jewish people no longer feel safe wearing a kippah in public; and that Jewish kindergartens, schools and synagogues must be surrounded by walls and protected by police officers.

We cannot accept this. A vibrant culture of remembrance includes standing up against antisemitism and xenophobic hatred, wherever we encounter them. Remembrance means never retreating into the comfortable yet irresponsible attitude that our own voices and our own actions, the gaze of our own eyes, do not matter.

The exhibition shows us just what a “cold eye” can bring about.

I hope that many interested visitors will have the opportunity to experience this exhibition.