

Welcome speech to open the *Der kalte Blick (The Cold Eye)* exhibition

A. Riedle, 20/10/2020

Vice President Petra Pau, State Minister Monika Grütters, Senator Andreas Geisel, Ambassador Andrzej Przyłębski, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to extend a warm welcome, including on behalf of my colleague Uwe Neumärker from the Foundation for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, to today's opening of the exhibition "The Cold Eye. Final Pictures of Jewish Families from the Tarnów Ghetto".

This is a special exhibition prepared by the Topography of Terror Foundation in co-operation with the Foundation for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe and the Natural History Museum of Vienna. It will run here at the Documentation Centre until next spring, and will open to all visitors to the centre tomorrow.

I would like to cordially welcome

- Dr Katrin Vohland, who is the director of the Natural History Museum of Vienna and will speak as one of the exhibition's organisers.
- Dr Margit Berner, who, as curator, will provide an introduction to the exhibition.

Among our guests, I would also like to welcome co-curator Götz Aly and Dr Susanne Heim.

And I would especially like to welcome the survivors – Ita Assif, Frania Haverland und Steve Israeler – and the families of the survivors watching our event on their computer screens! We are incredibly sorry we were unable to invite you to Berlin due to the current situation, and sincerely hope we will be able to make up for this at a later date.

The coronavirus pandemic has meant that unfortunately only a very small number of people can attend the opening in person, which is why we are also offering a livestream so that you, dear viewers watching us on your computer, can all actively follow our programme too.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dr Götz Aly and Dr Susanne Heim wrote, for the first time, about “race studies” of Jewish families in the West Galician town of Tarnów in their book *Architects of Annihilation: Auschwitz and the Logic of Destruction* nearly thirty years ago. These studies had been performed by Austrian anthropologists Dr Dora Maria Kahlich and Dr Elisabeth Fliethmann during World War II. And it is thanks to this book that Dr Margit Berner from the Natural History Museum of Vienna was, a few years later, able to attribute a number of anthropological photos from the museum’s collection to this “race studies” project.

The exhibition we are opening today is essentially centred on this photo documentation, much of which was hitherto unknown. The exhibits encompass portraits of 106 Jewish families who, in March 1942, were photographed in the German-occupied Polish town of Tarnów for the purpose of “racial biology” studies. The photos were taken by force and under the looming shadow of death, as the two anthropologists involved in this research project were aware that most of the Jewish people they were photographing for scientific purposes would be murdered soon after.

The team of curators, consisting of Dr Margit Berner, Dr Götz Aly, Dr Ulrich Baumann (Foundation for the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe), Dr Stephanie Bohra (Topography of Terror) and Dr Ulrich Baumann, grappled particularly intensively with the idea of how to even present a collection of “race studies” photos in the first place. The images are series of shots showing

the people from different angles, including front on and in profile. They are undeniably reminiscent of mugshots taken by police. Furthermore, many of the victims are also already visibly suffering from persecution and deprivation of rights. Of the 565 Jewish men, women and children studied, only twenty-six survived the Holocaust.

We decided to present the photos in a visible but invisible manner. We didn't want the people who were degraded to the status of scientific victims during the Nazi era to once again be used as 'showpieces'. And it was precisely this aspect that Christina Kitta and Frank Steinert executed so beautifully in their designing of the exhibition. They proposed exhibiting the images in such a way that they were hidden but still visible in a black cube that acted as an "image archive". The photos in the series, characterised by the scientists' "cold" look, are contrasted against personal photos taken in some of the Jewish families for their family albums. And yet: For most of the people forced to have their photos taken for the studies, these standardised, effectively racist photos were often the last, and indeed sometimes even the only preserved evidence of their life. This was another aspect addressed by the exhibition, while treating the photos with care.

In the last two decades in particular, the issue of Nazi race research and race policy has been increasingly examined in history studies. The exhibition we are opening today plays a key part in raising awareness of the scientific crimes committed under the Nazi regime. Because by focusing on "Nazi race anthropology", it very precisely documents scientists' role in these crimes – in our case even female scientists, who represent a group of perpetrators rarely ever examined to date. The exhibition also sheds light on the political importance placed on supposed scientific "objectivity" against the backdrop of the Holocaust.

I would also like to mention another aspect: The fact that the exhibition uses a specific example to provide well-founded insights into the Nazi policy of

persecution and extermination in the German-occupied eastern territories. It is important to remember here that the genocide of European Jews was initiated in Berlin, and was planned and organised by the Nazi terror headquarters that were based here. The depiction of the diversity of life in the city of Tarnów and its destruction by the German occupying forces frames the narrative of the racial study in the exhibition. Our colleagues from the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe Foundation, in cooperation with a researcher in Minsk, were able to research further photos of Jews rounded up on the market square in Tarnów, which are remarkable and shocking at the same time.

I would like to draw your attention to three additional components of our exhibition today:

We have created a catalogue of the entire image and text content presented, as well as an introductory essay by Dr Götz Aly. The catalogue may be purchased for 18 euros.

As part of the exhibition, we have additionally published a tome by Margit Berner, pooling the results of her years of research. It is entitled *Letzte Bilder. Die „rassenkundliche“ Untersuchung jüdischer Familien im Ghetto Tarnów 1942* ('Final Pictures. The 1942 "Race Study" of Jewish Families in the Tarnów Ghetto), and may be purchased for 22 euros.

And finally, we have teamed up with our partners to create a three-part accompanying programme that will run from January until the end of the exhibition. This will focus on the exhibition's key themes, which are discussed and examined in depth through presentations. You are cordially invited to participate in this when it starts.

To finish, I would like to extend a heartfelt thanks to everyone who made this exhibition possible, particularly the team of curators: Dr Margit Berner, Dr Götz Aly, Dr Ulrich Baumann and Dr Stephanie Bohra, whom I would also like to

5

thank for taking over the coordination of the project. We would also like to thank Agnieszka Wierzcholska for providing consulting services and the design team Christine Kitta and Frank Steinert for their successful architectural and graphic presentation.

And special thanks also to the foundation's funding bodies, the German federal government, the Berlin state government and the additional project support provided as part of the Capital Cultural Fund (HKF).

Our greatest thanks, however, go to the Holocaust survivors and their families, whose personal records, accounts and photos played a key part in the exhibition by giving us important insights into their painful history.

I would now ask the State Minister to give her opening address.