

*Address by Ambassador of Germany to Latvia, H.E. Rolf Schütte, at the dedication of the Synagogue Garden Memorial in Bauska on October 15, 2017.*

Mr. Mayor, Members of the Jewish Community, Members of the Diplomatic Corps, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to participate in this event and for giving me the opportunity to say a few words.

As the Ambassador of Germany to Latvia, I often speak at events. When I look back at the very long and very special history that binds Germany and Latvia, more precisely: Germans and Latvians. Here in Bauska we are in an area of Latvia which used to be the Duchy of Courland, first subdued by the Livonian Knights and later ruled by nobility that also originated in Germany. Today, Germany and Latvia are close partners and friends in the EU and in NATO.

But with all the positive that is shared by Germans and Latvians in history and present, we must not forget the darkest chapter of that history: the occupation of Latvia by Nazi Germany during the Second World War. During this period, it was the Jewish population of Latvia that suffered the most horrendous crimes. It was exterminated almost completely by the German occupiers and their Latvian collaborators.

When we gather at memorial sites such as Rumbula or Bikierniki we are reminded of the mass shootings of Latvian and German Jews, the way the Holocaust was carried out in countries like Latvia. But we also gather at the sites of burnt synagogues, at the Choral Synagogue in Riga or here in Bauska today. In Germany itself more than 1.400 synagogues and other places of Jewish worship were set on fire by the Nazis already in November 1938. In Germany the burning of the synagogues marked the transition from the discrimination of Jews to their active persecution and eventual annihilation in the concentration camps. Here in Latvia, the destruction of synagogues - like the one here in Bauska - and the mass killings of human beings - for whom the synagogue was a central element of their Jewish identity –more or less coincided.

I have attended many events – both in Germany, in Israel and in the United States – where the crimes of the Holocaust were remembered. But as a German and representing Germany as a country I still feel a great shame for what was done by Germans and in Germany's name when the Nazis ruled large parts of Europe.

History cannot be undone. And when we say, "Never again!" we should also remember that the Holocaust did not start in Auschwitz, in Rumbula or here in Bauska in the summer of 1941, but it started in the heart of Germany in 1933 when the discrimination of Jews in daily life began. When the synagogues burned and Jews and members of other minority groups were killed in concentration camps or in mass shootings, the evil could not be stopped any more.

Thus, if we want to draw a lesson from that history, we must be vigilant when we see the first signs of discrimination or persecution of minorities wherever they may live. Remembering and not forgetting what happened, honoring the victims and drawing the right lessons for the future, in my view, should always go hand in hand.

Thank you for your attention.