



**Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier  
at the ceremony to mark the first anniversary  
of the attack on the synagogue  
in Halle (Saale)  
on 9 October 2020**

A year has passed. A whole year. Only a year.

A year ago today, here in Halle, a nightmare became reality, in broad daylight, in the middle of Germany. Germany, of all places.

A year has passed, but the pain and outrage have not. Today my thoughts and my profound sympathies are with those who lost their loved ones. Two people were murdered in cold blood, Jana Lange and Kevin Schwarze. For their friends and families, nothing has been the same since. There is no consolation for their loss. As Federal President, today I say to you, the bereaved: we stand beside you. All of us. The people in our country join you in mourning. And we will not forget.

We also stand beside those who were seriously injured. We stand beside those who were in the sights of the perpetrator and his murderous hatred. You, the members of the Jewish community, who spent hours in fear for your lives, will never forget that 9 October. The effects weigh heavily on your hearts and minds. You are plagued by images that come to mind in the night, by the memory of being shut in, helpless, as the shots rang out. You are tortured by the memory of the fear that spread through the synagogue, of the powerlessness of parents as they tried to protect crying children, by the idea of what could have happened, and, above all, by the fear that such a nightmare could be repeated. We can only imagine what you are going through.

The nightmare of that 9 October was also experienced by the staff and customers of the Kiez Döner. Only a few minutes after firing shots at the door to the synagogue, the perpetrator threw explosives at the kebab shop, shot at passers by and killed a customer. Those who witnessed this attack will never be free of the images either. They, too, have our sympathy.

I am grateful to be here today. As Federal President I feel profound sadness. But one year on, I still feel shame and anger, too.

That 9 October is firmly entrenched in my memory as well. It was supposed to be a day of joy. Not far from here, in Leipzig, we were going to be remembering the courage of the tens of thousands of people who took to the streets on 9 October 1989, who dreamed of freedom and fought for their freedom, and for respect for human dignity. We wanted to celebrate those civil rights activists, those peaceful revolutionaries, without whom the Wall would never have fallen and our country would not have enjoyed 30 years of unity.

But a dark shadow fell over the celebrations. Even while we were talking in Leipzig about the courage of those who had toppled a dictatorship 30 years before, the news began to trickle through from Halle – rather vague at first, but gradually the full dimension of this monstrous act became clear. A right wing attacker wanted to carry out a massacre in a synagogue on the holiest day of the Jewish year. In broad daylight, in the middle of Germany. In Germany, of all places.

On Yom Kippur, of all days. The synagogue was full: old people, young people, families with children, visitors from abroad. They were to die; that was the perpetrator's barbaric plan.

That this brutal plan failed is nothing short of a miracle. A miracle which we owe, quite simply, to a door – an old wooden door. It, and only it, prevented a bloodbath. The image of the door pockmarked with bullet holes is firmly engraved in my memory as well. This door is a symbol of the wound wrought on 9 October 2019. But for me it is also a symbol of strength and cohesion. That is the message of the young artist Lidia Edel, who has reworked the door so wonderfully as a memorial.

The synagogue now has a new door, one that is even stronger, even more unyielding. For you, Mr Privorozki, and for the members of your community, that is certainly the least that had to be done. However, it cannot erase your worries in the face of rising antisemitism.

This, too, fills me with shame and anger: the fact that it is necessary to protect Jewish places of worship in our country. That heavily guarded kindergartens and schools are part of the everyday routine for Jewish children. That Jews always and at any time have to expect to be verbally abused, spat at or even violently attacked on the street. That Jewish graves and "Stolpersteine" commemorative plaques are defiled and dishonoured. That pernicious antisemitic propaganda and antisemitic hatred are on the rise – especially on the internet, though by far not only there – and that antisemitic crimes are increasing. Just at the beginning of this week, we were shocked by the

news of another antisemitic act of violence, outside the synagogue in Hamburg.

I am profoundly grateful that there is once again Jewish life in Germany. So it pains me all the more when Jews do not feel safe here. Since Halle, some have wondered publicly whether it is still their country. Or whether it is time to get the suitcases down from the attic, as historian Michael Brenner, son of two Holocaust survivors, put it.

For there have already been so many antisemitic acts of violence. Some took place a long time ago and the memory of them has faded away. I am thinking of the arson attack on the Jewish old folks' home in Munich, in which seven people lost their lives. The perpetrators were never found. I am thinking of the long standing head of the Jewish community in Nuremberg, Shlomo Lewin, and his partner Frida Poeschke, shot by a right wing extremist in their home in Erlangen, just a few weeks after the Oktoberfest bombing. However, such crimes are not a thing of the past. I am thinking of the many Jewish people who – to this very day – have fallen victim to violent attacks.

The list of antisemitic attacks since 1945 is long. It is a list of shame. It ought to occupy the mind of any democrat.

It is not enough to condemn an attack like that in Halle and then simply to return to business as usual. We must all take a firm stance. We must demonstrate that we will not tolerate any form of antisemitism, be it old or new, left wing or right wing; more than that – we will actively fight against it. This fight concerns us all.

Because antisemitism is a seismograph for the state of our democracy. The more openly it manifests itself, the stronger is the attack on our values, tolerance and respect for human dignity.

That is why we should be alarmed when critics of the COVID-19 containment measures reanimate old antisemitic conspiracy theories and spread them to millions. And allow me to say this: it is despicable that some of these critics are publicly putting on a yellow star. It is devoid of all respect for history. It is unbearable!

The hatred of the perpetrator in Halle is directed not only against Jews, but also against Muslims, against people with a migration background, against women, against what he regarded as left wing. We read that he would have been just as happy to attack a mosque. His hatred follows an all too familiar pattern: to categorise, degrade, marginalise and in extreme cases to dehumanise people whose skin is a different colour, who are perceived as being different, people who believe something different and have different convictions.

That is the logic of antisemitism, of racial hatred, of Islamophobia, of homophobia – of each and every form of inhumanity. Migrants and refugees and Muslims in our country are also insulted, discriminated against, threatened and murdered; their mosques are

defaced and attacked. Today some people's hatred is so great that a politician like Walter Lübcke was killed in cold blood for standing up for humanity. This hatred affects other politicians too, particularly at local level. We must not remain indifferent to any of this. We must not simply accept any of this.

Today we remember the attack in Halle. A few weeks ago I spoke with the relatives of the victims of Hanau, and shortly afterwards there was a memorial ceremony in Munich for the victims of the Oktoberfest bombing 40 years ago. Munich, Halle, Hanau: it is a long and bloody line that links these and many other acts, a line which also leads to the NSU murders and the murder of Walter Lübcke.

Right wing extremism reaches deep into our society and right wing terrorism reaches far back into our history. This realisation dawned only in the wake of the NSU murders – late, very late. This must be both a warning and an incentive for us.

In the case of Halle, and of Hanau, we know who the perpetrators are. But we have to know much more. We have to investigate the motives for and background to such acts; we have to trace networks in order to identify dangers earlier and, wherever possible, to prevent such crimes. This is, first and foremost, the task of the state and security agencies. But it concerns us all. The moment when they throw a bomb, fire a shot or set a fire ablaze is not the first moment that the perpetrators draw attention.

The perpetrator in Halle probably acted alone, but he is not alone in his hatred. The idea of a lone perpetrator, we now know, all too often diverted attention from the heart of the matter in the past. Perpetrators have an environment in which they become radicalised. They are involved in networks, both virtual and real. They have supporters, both virtual and real. By that I also mean those who generate a climate of hate with their words.

Let me say this quite clearly: anyone who spreads inhumane resentment and drives forward the division of our society into "them" and "us" is sowing the seeds for violence. We need to draw a much clearer line here. And that line is this: we do not tolerate inhumanity in our country, not in words and especially not in deeds!

Munich, the NSU murders, the murder of Walter Lübcke, Halle, Hanau: remembrance is responsibility. We must not look the other way!

Our Basic Law affords special protection for human dignity. That is the lesson learnt from our own history, and from that derives our obligation in the present.

It is an obligation for the state and its security forces to protect everyone, irrespective of skin colour, background and beliefs. And we must protect Jewish facilities, protect them better than hitherto! The

Federal Government and the Central Council of Jews in Germany recently reached an agreement on this. The Länder and municipalities are taking steps of their own.

Our Basic Law is also an obligation for each and every one of us, for every single person who lives and wants to live in this country. We have to intervene – on the underground, in cafés, on the playground, on the street, on the internet. Each and every one of us must stand up for the values of our constitutional democracy. Each and every one of us must stand up when the others' human dignity is being abused.

Not everyone is directly impacted by inhumanity, but it does affect us all. Because it is an attack on our open society. It strikes at the heart of our democracy. We must not allow that to happen!

And I am confident that the majority of people in our country do not want to allow it to happen.

So let us stand together – Christians, Jews and Muslims, believers and atheists, east and west Germans, those who have always lived here and those who have arrived recently. Together we stand against antisemitism, against racial hatred, against Islamophobia, against inhumanity. Here in Halle, and all across Germany.

Last year, 9 October brought a terrible message.

The people on the streets of Leipzig on 9 October 30 years ago carried the good message. They were strong, because they stood united. We are strong if we stand united. That is the legacy they have given us. It is at once a mandate and a duty.