

German Sensitivity for Justice, Respect and Peace

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The Child Survivors worldwide are welcome to their 26th annual conference, August 24th to 27th in Berlin. It will be organized by WFJCSHD (World Federation of Jewish Child Survivors of the Holocaust & Descendants), assisted by us, the German section.

This conference will be for the first time in Germany, after many years of considerations pro and contra. How will the German society react upon the challenge: We Child Survivors, the victims of the Nazi persecution, now finally “try to trust” Germany, to be a sufficiently democratic state, able to limit anti-Semitism to an appropriate extent. We hope to be welcome by the German society.

In that context, how will the Motto of the WFJCSHD conference 2014 in Berlin: “Justice, Respect and Peace” be perceived in Germany? The question is by no means easy to respond to. There are ambivalent feelings connected with such basic terms. Especially Jews in Germany are aware: Justice, Respect and Peace all are tense items, with meanings depending on contexts. The widespread range from being welcome to being refused covers a tremendous diversity of variations.

Diversity to be reestablished

Official governmental policy clearly displays the intention to grant justice, respect and peace towards Jews. Beyond that, manifold personal engagement and friendship is important for us – for both Jews in general, and for Child Survivors specifically. The current program “Diversity Destroyed” in Berlin is a marvelous example of combined friendship, sensitivity and powerful public support. It tells a lot about Jewish life in Berlin before and during the Nazi regime.

For our future this “diversity” implicates, what we want to re-establish ourselves, in the sense of Dieter Graumann, as forwarded in his book: “Nachgeboren – Vorbelastet? Die Zukunft des Judentums in Deutschland”. With the wording „Nachgeboren“ Graumann points to our 2G and 3G generations, and „Vorbelastet“ to their feelings of being under stress from ever so manifold disastrous impacts and starting conditions. 2G and 3G suffer from stress gotten from their parents, the post traumatic Child Survivors and older survivors, who never had had a peaceful youth within a flourishing family. The young Jews unavoidably suffer stress from a challenging, complex Jewish identity in transition. This is, where Graumann provides mental and spiritual guidelines, as he immediately emphasizes a common Jewish future as a brilliant option, affording our chuzpe to be established.

At our WF14 (Conference in Berlin) we shall be diplomatic: We shall acknowledge the official and friendly German support for both, Jews in general within their strong communities, and – while limited – also for us Child Survivors. At the same time we shall be realistic: We will objectively document where there is injustice, lack of respect, and violation of peace in its manifold manifestations.

Justice

For this word there are several distinct translations into German language, covering a broad spectrum of meanings and options. The famous “scales of justice” in fact are revealing both, good and bad acts of justice. Nevertheless, the official self-concept

and mainstream self-image of Germany is, to be a constitutional state under the rule of law in form of a constitutional democracy.

For us it means, that we can always request according behavior, whether in court, at administration offices or else. We are well aware, that in reality there are several (of course not all) administrations, who in principle rather deny requests for support or compensation, tolerated by their – by far too often fascistoid – management from above, where in some cases old Nazis and their successors, more often “sympathizers” are in top positions. A drastic case are “ghetto pensions” denied on the administrative level, until judge von Renesse did apply the law, as intended. But then he was taken out of his job, as the amount of money started to go beyond the funds anticipated and allocated. Our German association over and again in such cases raises a public protest.

Another basic problem is, that top Nazis were well protected by their civil servant status after 1945 up to now. Thus their pensions usually are above 3000.- Euro monthly, all automatically based on routine regulations. On the other hand, if a Child Survivor does succeed to get a monthly compensation, then it is about 300.- Euro. Thus there is a firmly established “legal injustice”. While illegitimate, it is still hard to attack. Members of our association are experts, who know several cases of Child Survivors, who cannot prove their own case, cannot provide documentary evidence: Inevitably the toughest cases of suffering have the least proof of authenticity at hand, often they suffer from not knowing anything about their origin. We are also in a way experts for the few cases, where our impression is, that a person claiming to be a Child Survivor, probably is wrong. Still these are very unfortunate, miserable human beings, who need help. The attitude towards difficult cases shall be less bureaucratic, the governmental regulations shall be less strict, because now almost 70 years after 1945 the liability to support “the wrong victim”, is low, the administrative danger of wasting money is limited.

In public, the “freedom of opinion” is a basic issue, guaranteed in the constitutional law. Thus the police protects Nazi demonstrations. Recently 80 Nazis demonstrating were protected by 800 police officers, near Alexanderplatz. But at least there are many counter demonstrations, many times in Berlin organized by our member Andrée Leusink, and a basic, in public established statement is:

“Fascism is not an opinion, but a crime!”

Nazis in Germany all the time demand crimes, commit crimes, and praise the crimes of Hitler, and for elections in Berlin they put up posters: “Gib Gas”. It was covered by the pretended “intention” to contribute to traffic issues, while it clearly should remind of – and praise – killing Jews by gas in concentration camps. To see such posters every day along many streets is horrible for Jews, and for Child Survivors especially. Both forms, respect and lack of respect, in Germany can assume quite drastic forms.

Respect

“Diversity Destroyed” in Berlin is a program full of respect for our Jewish identity. It is both professional and well-meaning respect. It displays with excellent photos, films, documents the Jewish life in Berlin before, and during the Nazi regime. It covers politics, art, science, everyday life. It demonstrates the former systematic exclusion of Jews in its various manifestations – and as always, some heroes who did help, as defined by AMCHA.

Still today, on many occasions, Jews feel refused, excluded, segregated as if they were not German citizens. It happens, that a Jew, whose family did live in Germany since several generations, is told that Israel would be his country.

A common and yet in effect radical form is, that Child Survivors shall rather not tell about their sufferings. The booklet by Hans Frankenthal: "Verweigerte Rückkehr" (Denied Return") tells, how Hans would be step by step integrated into his home village – but nobody would accept any message about his really cruel experiences until 1945. Even friends would call his report as impossible, as outright lies. It hurts.

In a way Child Survivors only among themselves feel really understood and accepted, therefore the German section, even if meeting just twice a year for 4 days in Bad Sobernheim, is very important. But unavoidably even among Child Survivors there are misunderstandings and disputes, and that then really hurts, and we need therapists to monitor the meetings.

Being a Child Survivor hurts right here and now – and support is needed for the sufferings now, not just compensation for being a former victim. And not just medical or social care is needed, but also group action, and that opens up a new kind of support necessary. While about 20.000.- Euro for a group (for one of the 60 Child Survivors associations) would be sufficient, a political decision needs to be forwarded. So far we did succeed in form of projects, but the administrative effort increasingly goes beyond the power of us about 80 years old Child Survivors.

Solution for respect and support of the very old Child Survivors

A seizable, convincing form of practical respect would be: Charitable status (gemeinnuetzig) should be sufficient to receive the support in general institutional form. In the same manner donation of sponsors require no financial report about use of the money in any detail. But German culture of administration abhors "institutional support". Thus such a demand cannot be realistic.

The solution shall be a new program, where projects can be arranged in the sense of a charitable status of a group. That shall be along "group needs", such as meetings, documentation, support for activity in society e. g. as time witnesses etc. CC first should support such demands in dealing with the German government. Thereafter CC would not have much administrative work with distribution to the 60 groups – at least with those, which have a fine charitable status, checked anyway annually, in order to be sustained. A report about the activities during a year, and a book-keeping in acknowledged accordance with the status, plus overview of main expenditures shall be easy to provide by the group and easy to check by an administrator such as Claims Conference.

The order of magnitude: as far as immediate support through grants is concerned, up to now there is an evident lack of respect for Child Survivors, and the order of magnitude is outrageous, scandalous, shocking: There has been and is quite some money for Jews, even billions of Dollars through CC for medical and social purposes, then tens of millions \$ for Jewish organizations, for museums, for public monuments of Child Survivors out of stone, and polishing, protecting by police thereof. Much money is spent for fascist monuments. For the Nuremberg Rally Area alone, 70 Million Euro are planned for renovation. It should have been destroyed 1946, there had been already enough photos for documentation and museums anyway.

For comparison, the civilized needs our group of Child Survivors are not even covered with a few thousands of \$, or only with tedious projects, or with degrading repeated begging for some public sponsoring by Jewish institutions for rather modest gifts such as 1.000.- €.

A special concern are our 2G. Apparently many of them have intense problems with both us as their parents and with themselves. Within our association tensions were dramatically violent, and we had to separate, in the sense that no 2 G or 3 G is a member in our association. So far they did not succeed to form an own association. While there is a lot of mutual help among Child Survivors and their 2G, still that help often has a lot of tensions. This phenomenon certainly is much more dramatic and widespread, than in other countries. There is no public respect for 2G, there is no awareness of their situation. In promoting their needs, the characteristics, as distinct from other countries, must be recognized.

Peace

Violence in every form causes alarm and even panic among Child Survivors. Germany is safe, there is a probability to be offended of about once in 40 years, and seldom an offence will include violence. And of course for the conference at Hilton we will arrange extra security protection.

How about otherwise in Berlin? There is sometimes violence in S-Bahn (interurban train), sometimes in U-Bahn(subway, underground railway), and outskirts, mostly late at night, and when young aggressive gangs find a wagon with only one or few travelers. It can be important, "not to behave as a victim". Usually the driver will hear assaults and call the police, but far out of town the response can take some time. In the city only rather seldom there is a problem. But as soon as an assault does occur, then the public awareness and support can be powerful.

An example: The Rabbi Daniel Alter of Jewish community Berlin, wearing a kippah had been asked whether he was a Jew, he answered "Yes", and was attacked and hurt, and had to be in a hospital. There even had been a death menace against his 6 years old daughter. Public support in media was great, and now he became promoted as "Beauftragter gegen Antisemitismus" (authorized agent against anti-Semitism).

Nazis in election get a few percent, they are not in the Bundestag (federal parliament), but they are in two state parliaments in East Germany. Nazis often try to organize demonstrations. It is a very essential feature in Germany, that always a lot more people come to "counter demos" against any Nazi-demos.

All Jews including Child Survivors of course wish all the best for Israel. Trips to Israel are prominent. But the attitude towards the Israeli politics is different, and debates are partly fierce.

By and large in Germany the danger of atomic war is no more present. The awareness, that World war II was a disaster, is still there, and Nazis still are constrained with power, as soon as they dare to appear in public.

On the administrative and secrecy level, governmental agents of all kinds were focused against leftist dangers, and systematically neglected or denied rightist, fascist dangers. Investigation committees were by and large again the same agents. But anyway, after decades of covering, of drawing the curtain over old Nazis still in their offices, then some fascist structures and persons, such as Nazis in Foreign

Office, in Ministry for Finance, now during the last years have been documented alright.

The most important reality is, that there are many fine staff with a very friendly attitude towards Jewish persons and institutions, for instance from the Foreign Office we got fine support for our 2014 conference of WFJCSHD.

Still overall it is ok, to perceive Germany as a state with a culture of justice, where Jews are supported, while not in every form, not for every issue.

Child Survivors and 2G in Germany have a high sensitivity for all kinds of indirect violence in the form of arbitrary administrative acts, and for all kinds of direct violence, violation of laws, and imminent warfare. Child Survivors as time witnesses over and again tell the youth, how important it is to avoid violence in all its forms. I know many fragile Child Survivors, who do their utmost, to visit schools as time witnesses, and help to create a more promising future.

The 26th annual conference of WFJCSHD, the first to be in Germany, certainly is a challenge for both, Child Survivors and the German society. The outcome is open. Our intention is straightforward. The conference shall help to build up better relations for Jews within the German society, and some understanding for the fate of Child Survivors – mainly for extreme sufferings both until and for the time after 1945 and especially right now. The “post-traumatic stress disorder” caused by Shoah, with remote damages now in old age, is a challenge way beyond former expectations, meantime thoroughly investigated by psychologists.

Altogether the conference shall give the old Child Survivors a new confidence and hopefully even some solace. Best precondition would be through the impression of a responsible and sensitive German society nowadays. Thus after waiting several decades in vain, they might now perhaps derive some long time desired comfort from the encounter.