

March 11, 2023

PRESS RELEASE



JOINT STATEMENT: SHOOTING SPREE IN HAMBURG REQUIRES DILIGENCE IN REPORTING AND SOLIDARITY WITH THE ATTACKED JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

We stand with the Jehovah's Witnesses who were attacked with brutal violence in their Hamburg congregation on the evening of March 9, 2023. We feel with the injured, with the mother of the murdered unborn child, with the families and friends of the murdered. We remember the seven people whose lives were cruelly extinguished that evening.

Those murdered were part of a Christian faith community that, in past and present, has been and continues to be violently attacked and persecuted. Jehovah's Witnesses were the first religious community to be banned by the Nazis. The National Socialists murdered about 1,800 Jehovah's Witnesses because they refused military service and the *Führer* cult, offered Christian resistance to the dictatorship of terror, and stood by other persecuted people. Hundreds of Jehovah's Witnesses lost their lives and thousands were imprisoned under communist tyranny in the German Democratic Republic and Eastern Europe. In 1994, 400 Jehovah's Witnesses were murdered in Rwanda for opposing genocide. In the Russian Federation today, Jehovah's Witnesses are persecuted, disenfranchised, mistreated. More than 100 are in prisons and penal camps.

Politics, society and media in the Federal Republic of Germany have a historical responsibility towards Jehovah's Witnesses. At the moment of the murder of seven German citizens, prejudices that have been cultivated for decades must not be allowed to break out. The media in particular have a duty of care. Similar to other minorities, the threshold to malice, hatred and baiting is quickly crossed, as is already evident in social networks, but also in some comments in papers of record and mainstream media.

The fact is that these prejudices have been refuted time and again by solid research and in court cases. The Federal Constitutional Court has granted Jehovah's Witnesses the status of a public corporation as religious community. The European Court of Human Rights has repeatedly condemned discrimination against Jehovah's Witnesses.

The fact is that Jehovah's Witnesses are a peace-loving Christian community committed to non-violence, for whom anti-racism has been a lived reality for decades.

The fact is that many of the prejudices directed against Jehovah's Witnesses as a religious community, as well as against the more than eight million individual believers worldwide, with nearly 200,000 Jehovah's Witnesses in Germany, were shaped in times of anti-pluralistic thinking and *Volksgemeinschaft* ideology. Radical nationalist, National Socialist and church

circles used these prejudices to justify persecution and violence. In the Federal Republic, the view of this Christian community was dominated for decades by “experts” who were by no means unbiased and whose own churches had not offered any resistance to National Socialism comparable to that of the Jehovah’s Witnesses.

The fact is that shooting spree perpetrators not infrequently single out victims in their social environment – for example, at their (former) schools. It is inappropriate to speculate about a connection between the religious community and the perpetrator’s motives. The victims of a crime cannot and must not be misused to explain the actions of a criminal. It is inappropriate to misuse this terrible crime as an occasion for prejudiced reporting or comments about Jehovah’s Witnesses.

It is necessary to wait for the investigation and to preserve the dignity of the victims of this crime.

We call upon all citizens and especially politicians and the media to live up to Germany’s historical responsibility towards Jehovah’s Witnesses and to show their solidarity with this Christian community today and beyond today.

Let us all oppose every prejudice, every hatred, every baiting. Let us defend human dignity, let us defend the dignity of each and every single Witness of Jehovah.

Foundation Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe

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A memorial to the Jehovah’s Witnesses persecuted and murdered under National Socialism is supported by numerous personalities from academia, politics, groups of victims of Nazi persecution, and institutions of commemoration:

www.alst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Unterschriften_Denkmal_NS-verfolgte_ZJ.pdf

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