

Speech by
H.E. Mrs. Dorothee Janetzke-Wenzel,
Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany
to the Republic of the Union of Myanmar,
on the occasion of the commemoration of the International Day
in memory of the victims of the Holocaust

Honorable Minister,

Honorable Rector of the University of Yangon, Professor Dr. Pho Kaung,

Your Excellency and dear colleague Ambassador of Israel, Mr. Daniel Zonshine,

Your Excellency the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, Mr. Knut Ostby

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, and especially dear students,

Former German President Roman Herzog once said: “Responsibility is the inevitable consequence of freedom”. He himself showed responsibility when he was among those who suggested to introduce the 27th January (the day on which survivors at the concentration camp Auschwitz were liberated) as the day of remembrance for the victims of National Socialism. The UN introduced this day in commemoration of the Holocaust and has been honoring it in special ceremonies. Former president Herzog also was the first German president to visit Auschwitz and he prepared Germans for the “Future of Remembrance” meaning for a time when remembrance will have to make do without eyewitnesses.

For Germany the Holocaust Remembrance Day on 27th January is an important occasion to bow our heads and to remind ourselves that it was Germans who during World War II and the dictatorship of National Socialism were responsible for the killing of 6 million Jews, half a million Sinti and Roma, gay people, handicapped and dissidents. Many of them died in concentration camps like Auschwitz, a name that has become a synonym for the crimes against humanity and the horrors of what people are capable of doing to fellow human beings. Germans after WW II had and until today have to live with the reality that they not only caused a war which ended with a Europe in total physical destruction, but also in a humanitarian disaster and a moral disaster: People had been killed because they belonged to a particular ethnic group, had a certain belief or conviction, or were critics of the regime. This meant that all moral foundations and human values had been violated and destroyed. The tragedy of the Jewish people was unique: two thirds of all Europe's Jews, including 1 million children were murdered.

We cannot undo what happened in the past. But as Germans we have vowed "Never again". It is not always easy to continue to educate today's generations in the understanding of Germany's special responsibility towards Jewish people and towards people who are being persecuted - because of our history. It is not easy to prevent war crimes and atrocities from being committed like in Cambodia, in Rwanda, in Darfur, in former Yugoslavia. But as Germans we feel a great responsibility. Germany today is a stable democracy. In Europe, we enjoy greater freedom than we have ever had. But this means we have to live up to our responsibilities. We still need to continue to be vigilant and to reject all signs of anti-Semitism, racism or discrimination because of religion. Former President Herzog would have been shocked and appalled by voices lately heard in Germany that it was time to do away with the "culture of remembrance". Germany can only be understood in the light of her 20th century history. If asked why the Federal Chancellor opened the country for refugees in 2015 history gives an answer. When people are singled out and accused because they belong to a different ethnic group or are praying within the framework of a different religion Germans are reminded of their own past and feel responsible. That is why as Germans and Europeans we are disturbed by what has been happening in

Rakhine. Germany cannot undo her past. MMR still has the chance to take up the responsibility that comes with freedom in regards to the Moslem population in Rakhine and maybe also in regards to other ethnic groups in this country.

One of the most remarkable people of MMR was U Thant, General Secretary of the United Nations. He stands for the principles on which the United Nations were built and he would have held people of all countries to these principles laid down in the Preamble (I quote some excerpts): “We the peoples of the United Nations determined... to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained ... to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors, ...”

Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel once said: “I swore never to be silent whenever and wherever human beings endure suffering...” Germany will continue to take up her responsibility in continuing the “culture of remembrance” and in educating young Germans about the Holocaust, this terrible crime against humanity.