

**Remembrance Day Service (Volkstrauertag)  
Sunday, November 19, 2023  
Woodland Cemetery, Kitchener**

**-- Check against delivery --**

[Greeting]

Thank you for joining us at today's Remembrance Day Service. In German, "Volkstrauertag" translates to "People's Day of Mourning".

It is a day of commemoration for the soldiers who died in the world wars, for people who died as a result of acts of war or in captivity, for displaced persons and refugees who lost their lives – children, women, men.

We gather today to commemorate tragedy beyond measure. The two World Wars killed 87 million people – a number higher than Germany's entire population today. These people died as the terrible and ultimate consequence of nationalism and imperialism that caused my country to bring untold suffering over the world and resulted in the worst crime ever committed in the form of the Holocaust. All these victims are a reminder to us that we must never fall back on these hateful ideologies that lead to war, oppression and genocide.

I would like to express my gratitude to the German Canadian Remembrance Society for organizing this service every year and for maintaining this place of mourning and rest, a place where 187 German soldiers are buried.

These men were interned as prisoners of war and died in Canada. We are grateful to our Canadian friends that they could find their rest here, in Kitchener.

Today we think of all victims of violence and war. We mourn the victims of wars and civil wars of our days, the victims of political persecution, the victims of terrorism and extremism, of anti-Semitism and racism.

The culture of remembrance is an important link between the past, the present and the future. The Federal Republic of Germany was founded on the promise "never again" and it is our duty to live up to this promise. Right now, in times of shockingly rising antisemitism in Germany and worldwide, it is all the more important that we stand together with our Jewish communities and remain committed to Holocaust Education – in Germany, in Canada and around the world.

War cemeteries are primarily places to mourn and to remember those we lost to war and tyranny. At the same time, they are memorials that remind us to take responsibility for a peaceful life and future.

My home country was fortunate enough to have enjoyed an unprecedented period of peace since leaving the evils of nationalism behind us – thanks to the liberation by Allied powers including Canada. We are committed to remembering our darkest history to ensure it never repeats itself.

As we are mourning our own citizens, we also owe a debt of gratitude and solemn remembrance to all Allied soldiers, many Canadians among them, who fought and died and helped to defeat national socialism. Thanks to their sacrifice in war and their support in rebuilding Germany afterwards, my parents, my children and I were able and are able to grow up in freedom, peace and prosperity.

Sadly, for many others, that is not the case. At this moment, over 110 million people are displaced from their homes due to wars and armed conflicts, the highest number ever recorded.

These days, our thoughts are with the people of Israel in light of the barbaric attack of Hamas terrorists on Israel on October 7. Israel can count on Germany's staunch and unwavering support as it defends itself against Hamas' terror. As democracies, we stand shoulder to shoulder. Of course, Israel must do everything in its power to protect civilians. That also applies if Hamas continues to take cover behind hundreds of thousands of civilians and deliberately buries itself below schools and hospitals.

While it is now less prominent in the headlines, we must not forget that we are still witnessing Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine, in the heart of Europe, that is writing a new chapter in our history. The Ukrainian people are not only fighting this war for the survival of their country. They are also fighting for a free Europe and for our democratic values and rights. The Russian war of aggression is causing great suffering, especially for the civilian population. We will make sure that we keep our promise and continue our support for Ukraine as long as the people of Ukraine need it.

Hopefully, every war comes eventually to an end. It is important that we reflect on the past; reconciliation is only possible through honest examination of our history, especially when it comes to crimes committed in the name of our country. This remains an enduring task.

On November 11, Canadians and Germans stood together during Remembrance Day to pay their respect to all war victims. I joined hands with my French counterpart to lay down a wreath together, a symbol of the French-German friendship that we built after 1945.

Today, at the German Volkstrauertag, our Canadian friends place a wreath to pay their respect to German prisoners of war. I thank you for your compassion and solidarity!

Now is the time for liberal democracies around the world to stand together in commemoration and united in the strong desire to build a better future for our children and a just and peaceful world.

Looking ahead, I would like to quote Paul Löbe, then President of the Reichstag, speaking at the first official Volkstrauertag ceremony 1922 in Berlin:

*“Leiden zu lindern, Wunden zu heilen, aber auch Tote zu ehren, Verlorene zu beklagen, bedeutet Abkehr vom Hass, bedeutet Hinkehr zur Liebe, und unsere Welt hat die Liebe not.“*

*“To alleviate suffering, to heal wounds, but also to honor the dead and to mourn those lost, means to turn away from hate, and to turn to love; our world needs love.”*

Today, we bow our heads in mourning to the dead of war, and the victims of violence and terror. We take their sacrifice as a reminder of our responsibility for a future in peace and freedom.

Thank you all for coming.