

Mayors, Commanders, Rabbis, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Two years ago, after more than 100 years, my wife and I managed to locate the grave of Emmanuel Schuster, my grandfather's brother. He was killed at the beginning of the Great War, and the news of his death reached his family in the small village of Sterbfritz in the state of Hessen. His brothers also enlisted, and one of them, Karl, fell at the war's end. With the help of my friend, Secretary General Brigadier General (ret.) Dirk Backen, we now know where he is buried as an anonymous soldier.

In the 1930s, my grandfather Natan was a victim of the Nazi regime's antisemitism. After "Kristallnacht", he was imprisoned in the Buchenwald concentration camp and had to emigrate to South America with his small family. Until his untimely death in exile from Germany, my grandfather carried in the pocket of his coat the Iron Cross he had been awarded as a combat soldier in the Kaiser's army.

Nathan's son, Yehuda—my father—immigrated from Argentina to Israel, and founded Kibbutz Mefalsim, located 1.3 kilometers from the Gaza border, with my mother and many friends .

We are Israelis who believe in the Jewish people's right to a democratic state that lives in peace with the minorities within it and with neighboring nations and countries. We are kibbutz members who believe in the values of equality and justice and live these values in a thriving, communal way of life.

For 16 years, I served my neighbors and friends as the head of the Sha'ar HaNegev Regional Council. A significant part of my activity was influenced by our proximity to the Gaza Strip. I dealt extensively with defending the community and residents from ongoing terror while also encouraging initiatives for economic civilian cooperation with our neighbors.

Ofir Libstein, from Kibbutz Kfar Aza, replaced me six years ago in this role. He led the establishment of a large industrial park on the border between Israel

and Gaza, where ten thousand workers from Gaza were supposed to work. On October 7, 2023, Ofir was killed at the start of the invasion of his kibbutz .

My son, my brother, and I all participated in defending our home against the terrorists, who, in our case, failed.

The news of the hate crime—of the damage to the graves of Jewish soldiers—reached me amidst during a series of funerals I attended. I know dozens of friends, both children and adults, who were murdered in that shocking attack. I demand the return of 101 of my friends and neighbors who have been kidnapped in Gaza under terrible conditions, for a year now.

I would like to say a few words about determination and hope.

In Israel, France, Germany, the United States, and the world over, we are committed to standing firm against xenophobia, the discrimination of minorities, attacks on the foundations of democratic regimes, and assaults on the rights of nations and peoples to live in security. The problem of xenophobia and fear of the other exists in every human society, including Israel. We must not confuse maintaining security and fighting crime—whether civic or nationalist—with the persecution of minorities or governmental harassment of people and communities.

The restoration of the graves, which we commemorate here today, is an essential act in the determined stand against this terrible hate crime .

The spirit of humanity is nourished not only by assertive action against evil but also by inspiring examples of cooperation between nations, communities, and individuals. My grandfather knew how to separate the evil regime that took over Germany from the people and their culture. In the same way, we must all distinguish between extreme and cruel leaders and the human beings trapped under their rule.

Having lived in the Middle East for quite some time, in a violent environment that finds it difficult to part from the ways of war, I look with admiration at the

stable cooperation between Germany and France. The circumstances are different, of course. But the ability to live through three generations of peaceful, mutual understanding after hundreds of years of mutual harm serves as an example for me—for us—that we must never lose hope.

I thank you, the organizers of this international, interreligious, and interhuman ceremony. May it be that from here—from this terrible battlefield that has become a monument for the cessation of war, from the place where yet another wave of hostility struck the memory of the victims of war, from the place where the small and persecuted Jewish people suffered another blow—may a cry arise, a cry that shakes the whole world. A cry for reconciliation, understanding, and compassion. From here, may the commitment arise to continue to fight against hatred and evil and to strive for human brotherhood.

I would like to thank the workers, soldiers, and community leaders in France and Germany who are implementing the vision of the prophet Isaiah (ישעיהו):

“And He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide for many peoples, and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation shall not lift sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” (Isaiah, chapter 2, verse 4)

”וְשָׁפַט בֵּין הַגּוֹיִם וְהוֹכִיחַ לְעַמִּים רַבִּים וְכָתְתוּ חֲרִבּוֹתָם לְאַתִּים וְחֲנִיתוֹתֵיהֶם לְמִזְמָרוֹת לֹא יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל גּוֹי חֶרֶב וְלֹא יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה.” (ישעיהו, פרק ב', פסוק

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