

Für die Presse

Address by the Chairman of the German Commission for Justice and Peace, Bishop Dr Heiner Wilmer SCJ, on 9 November 2023 at the grave of Oskar Schindler

Jerusalem, 9. November 2023. Today, the Chairman of the German Commission for Justice and Peace, Bishop Dr Heiner Wilmer SCJ, has laid a wreath at the grave of Oskar Schindler in Jerusalem.

We are standing here at the grave of Oskar Schindler in Jerusalem on 9 November, the memorial day of the Night of the Pogrom (Reichspogromnacht) 1938. Oskar Schindler led an eventful life full of contradictions. Full of entanglements, failure, guilt, defeat, but also of love and human kindness.

His life is particularly well remembered for one thing: His willingness to save Jews at the risk of his own life during the Second World War. This at a time when far too few were prepared to do so or had the courage to do so. It is no coincidence that Yad Vashem honoured him as Righteous Among the Nations.

The Talmud says: "Whoever saves just one life saves the whole world." Even if this act seems small compared to the scale of the Shoa it is significant! And not only for those whose lives were saved. Because this sign of unbroken humanity is a very concrete indication that violence and anti-Semitism will not have the last word. The flame of humanity cannot be completely extinguished even under the worst conditions. For in it burns the fire of God. Oskar Schindler's deed has contributed to not losing faith in humanity and to building bridges between the descendants of the persecuted and the descendants of the persecutors. We have reason to be grateful.

But this thought quickly degenerates into false religious consolation if it is not accompanied by a self-critical reflection on what we owe to the victims and the suffering people in these days. And so, today we think in grief of the many people who have been killed and injured in Israel since the terrorist attack by Hamas on October 7th. We mourn also the innocent civilian people, killed in Gaza. People suffer on both sides of the border.

May there be people who help to heal their wounds and save their lives. May we become such people. May the spirit of humanity confront hatred and its temptations.

In this context, Oskar Schindler is a beacon of hope. Let us pray: God who encouraged Oscar Schindler in his time, encourage us in our time. Heal the wounds. Free the captives. Console the afflicted. We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Herausgeber:

Deutsche Kommission JUSTITIA ET PAX
Hannoversche Str. 5, D 10115 Berlin
Telefon: +49 (30) 30 243428-153
Telefax: +49 (30) 243428-288
e-mail: jl@jupax.de
<http://www.Justitia-et-Pax.de>

Einrichtung der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz
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Redaktion:

Dr. Jörg Lüer
Geschäftsführer