



Rechtsanwalt JR Dr. Norbert Westenberger – Vizepräsident der Bundesrechtsanwaltskammer
Ansprache am 13.05.2009 in der Temple Church, London

JR Dr. Norbert Westenberger, Lawyer and vice president of the German Federal Bar,
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Ladies and Gentleman,

the Holocaust, the greatest tragedy of the 20th century, destroyed the outstanding cultural elite of Europe. Looking at Germany and Austrian Jewry at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, with people like Martin Buber, Fritz Haber, Gustav Mahler, Sigmund Freud, Kurt Eisner, Max Liebermann, Albert Einstein, Stefan Zweig, we see that this group was the essence of „Modernism“ in all aspects of culture - science, law, engineering, banking, art, theatre music and Journalism.

The number of Jewish lawyers in Germany was relatively high at the beginning of the 20th century and continuously increasing. In 1933 in Germany almost half of practicing solicitors were Jewish. In big cities like

Berlin it was even more: there were 3400 lawyers and about 2000 were Jewish.

The relative peace of Weimar came to an abrupt end on January 30 1933, when Hindenburg surrendered power to Adolf Hitler. The democratic state ceased to exist. On that day the fate of German Jews was sealed.

Jews were excluded from all areas of social life. In the administration of Justice, too, a distinction was made between Jews and non-Jews. Already in March 1933 a decree was published, which refused all Jewish Judges, public prosecutors and all lawyers access to court from the following day on.

One would have expected that most of the disbarred Jewish lawyers would have left Germany immediately. But for us - as we know the results of Holocaust - surprisingly not. Some of them believed all this as temporary, some feared emigration and there was also a commercial and financial situation. Not all lawyers were wealthy enough to live for a longer term without any professional income. Life of German Jews was also more and more determined by isolation in their daily social life. The anti-Semitism was increasing and only a few non-jewish German did not exclude their former friends and neighbors from their friendship.

The exhibition's display reflect a time in Germany when the individual rights and the rule of law were completely neglected. Many non-Jewish German lawyers in those days were silent, did not say a word, there was no real resistance, most of them did not even try to help their colleagues. They were silent. Why, we do not know and this exhibition does not give an answer. They defiantly failed and also the lawyers organisations. But it reminds us to raise the question again and again. And there are still questions left. It took more than 60 years that this exhibition could be organised after the Holocaust. How is this possible. There may be many attempts to justify, to excuse. In the end it is a shame.

The exhibition has been shown now since its establishment in 2000 in 50 cities in Germany and worldwide. I am pleased to tell you that many people have visited the exhibition and it has found a widespread attention

and interest among school classes. Most of the German regional bars have started research and investigation in their history and in the fate of their jewish colleagues which is difficult as most of the written information has been destroyed during second world war. 12 books have been published, the last from the German Federal Bar with an overview about the regional research.

I am moved and thankful that the exhibition is now open in Temple Church here in London. Therefore I would like to thank specially the local organisation, Referent Robin Griffith-Jones and Richie Burmann from the Jewish Museum in London.