

THE LEO BAECK INSTITUTE ANNUAL AWARD DINNER
honoring President Frank-Walter Steinmeier
Remarks by Ambassador Ronald S. Lauder
New York, Thursday, 18 November 2021

**EMBARGO until Thursday 18 November 2021
07.45 pm (19.45) New York Time**

President Steinmeier... members of the Leo Baeck Institute ... Ladies and Gentlemen....

It is truly my honor to share this podium tonight with one of the world's great leaders ... a man of integrity and courage ... German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier ... and especially here at the Leo Baeck Institute.

There is no other organization that has done more to document... study... and remember ... the very deep ties between the Jewish people and Germany.

I've always thought that naming this institution after Leo Baeck was the perfect choice ... because no individual personifies the German-Jewish experience in the 20th century better than Rabbi Leo Baeck ... one of the leading theologians of his era.

Rabbi Baeck was a huge force in the inter-faith movement ... he served as a chaplain in the Kaiser's army in World War I ... and was a Holocaust survivor in the next war. His work after the war ... both in London and here in the U.S. ... was another example of German Jewish continuity.

We would be here all night if we focused on the incredible ... and very positive ... influence that Jewish citizens had on Germany – intellectual, scientific, cultural, economic.

We would also be here all night if I told you about all the truly caring acts that Walter-Frank Steinmeier has done throughout his life.

President Steinmeier, I offer you my congratulations on this singular honor from the Leo Baeck Institute.

I can think of no recipient more worthy of this award than you, Sir – for your warmth, your kindness, your honesty and your decency.

But also for your lifelong commitment to the Jewish people ... to the Jewish State of Israel ... and for your great efforts to repair what was shattered and destroyed.

Today ... now in the 3rd decade of the 21st century, we are witnessing the greatest rise in anti-Semitism since the end of war in 1945.

At a time when too many world leaders are silent ... there is one man who speaks forcefully and with great moral force ... and that is you, Mr. President.

We are very aware of what you say ... and what you do.

And for that, the Jewish people are so grateful for your courage, your honesty and your friendship.

Germans and Jews will be tied together for all time for the worst possible reasons.

We cannot pretend this does not exist.

But to the credit of both of our people ... tremendous strides have been made since the creation of the Federal Republic in 1949.

More than any of its allies, Germany has dealt with its World War II past in an honest and honorable way.

Germany accepted its responsibility... and that could not have been easy.

You have educated the next generations on the evils of Nazism.

You hid nothing.

You have made it clear that the symbols of Nazism have no place, whatsoever, in Germany.

This began with Konrad Adenauer and has continued with every chancellor and government since the rebirth of the Federal Republic.

The Jewish people have also played an equal role in this effort.

It has always amazed me that after all of the horrors that were inflicted on European Jews, after all the loss and suffering ... those that survived simply walked away to build new lives in other places.

NO RIGHT OF RETURN WAS DEMANDED.

NO REPRISAL KILLINGS.

NO TERROR.

When you think about this ... that is an incredible statement ... especially in today's world.

Germany has also understood that it has a special relationship ... a responsibility ... with the Jewish State of Israel and has been not just one of its great defenders, but also its largest trading partner.

And for that, all Jewish people are grateful.

However, this doesn't mean that everything is right.

As president of the World Jewish Congress, I am – like you, President Steinmeier – facing the sad reality that today ... members of the Jewish communities in Germany and other parts of Europe are asking themselves if their children are safe and can possibly have future as free and peaceful as any other European.

Unfortunately, the truthful answer is:

“We don't really know.”

Jews have once again been attacked and murdered throughout Europe for one reason – because they were Jewish.

If you have to have an armed policeman outside of your house of worship ... or in front of your child's school ... is this the kind of country where anyone would want to live?

The attacks against Jews have increased a thousand-fold on the internet.

Some of the most vile anti-Semitism – reminding us of Der Sturmer – has re-surfaced once again.

The blood libels against the Jews during the COVID pandemic are coarse reminders of what was said during the Black Death in the 13th Century.

How depressing that some parts of mankind have not progressed since the middle ages.

There is another part to this new anti-Semitism.

These attacks – both physical and on-line – are no longer on the front pages of newspapers. Now – if they appear at all – they have turned into “*Randnotiz*” ... or short news. We call it the back pages here in the U.S.

It’s almost as if the public has accepted this hate against Jews.

This is something that must never just be “accepted” or tolerated.

That is why your voice, President Steinmeier, is absolutely vital in this ongoing effort against anti-Semitism.

You have been one of the most outspoken leaders in Europe against anti-Semitism ...

You are someone who has constantly reminded Europeans that “forgetting” or “ignoring” is not an option.

((PAUSE))

We recently passed the 83rd anniversary of Kristallnacht just last week on November 9th. Besides the violence and destruction against German and Austrian Jews ... the silence that followed still shocks us.

It was the world’s indifference that acted as the silent partner to the Nazis.

Mr. President, I honestly believe that if you had been in office in 1938 ... you would not have been indifferent.

You would not have been silent.

This is who you are.

If there had been more people like yourself, everything that followed Kristallnacht would have been different.

I truly believe this... and it is so important ... because when decent people stand up to intolerance ... it has a very positive effect.

President Steinmeier ... there is one more topic that is both difficult to mention and at the same time, impossible not to.

No nation should threaten another nation with total destruction.

After everything we learned from the Second World War, we know that statements have consequences ... and threats, especially when they are constantly repeated .. can lead to no good end.

It is even written in the U.N. charter ... in black and white: No nation can threaten another U.N. member.

Yet, again and again, Iran promises to wipe Israel from the map.

Just like the Nazis 85 years ago ... Iran does not pretend to hide its intentions.

Murderous regimes never hide their intentions.

It is therefore absolutely imperative that Germany – of all countries – stop its deal making ... its technology transfers ... and its business with a country that promises to destroy the Jewish State of Israel.

Mr. President, you have spoken out against this and now, more than ever, the entire world needs to hear your voice on this topic.

Any money derived from business dealings with the Iranian mullahs who promise to destroy Israel and murder 6-million more Jews is dirty money ... and no one should participate in this ... especially no one in Germany.

Wiping the Jewish State of Israel off the map is a red line that should not be crossed by anyone ... and we trust Germany's promise— based on its special history – that Israel, like every other country on earth, has a right to exist in safety and security.

This should not just be done just for the Jewish people.

This should be done for all people ... because as we have always seen in the past ... evil may be directed against Jews first ... but eventually, everyone suffers.

Ladies and Gentlemen... in his own way ... President Steinmeier has made it clear that the safety and freedom of Israel and the Jewish communities is part of the constitutional duty of the Federal Republic.

You have been absolutely consistent on this topic ... and we appreciate this so much.

The question is ... how can we make sure that this will continue?

Perhaps that is our greatest challenge, Mr. President.

It is my hope, that 30 years from now ... whoever replaces us – that the Bundespraesident President ... and the president of the World Jewish Congress ... will stand here at the Leo Baeck Institute and say basically the same things that we are saying tonight.

Because... anti-Semitism will never go away completely.

It's been with us for 2,000 years.

It will never be eradicated.

But let us hope that Jewish leaders and German leaders will always stand together in the fight against this hatred .. as we do here tonight.

This is a constant battle that will require ...

Constant and steady vigilance .. as well as Zero tolerance.

That is the only way.

We at the World Jewish Congress look forward to working and cooperating in this fight together with you to make sure the next generation understands just why this is so important.

The Jewish communities in Germany are so grateful for the messages of solidarity and friendship after the attacks that have occurred ... but rather than fighting this hatred defensively ... we must – together – find ways to prevent attacks before they take place.

Your commitment against all forms of anti-Semitism has been ... and will continue to be crystal clear – of this we have no doubt.

With people like you in office ... we know the hatred of the Jewish people in ANY form will not be tolerated.

People must know that Jewish voices matter ... and anti-Jewish voices and their enablers will be stopped.

We have great hopes for you President Steinmeier ... because you have always stood against this form of hate right from the start.

I know I should not venture into German politics ... but let us just say that we are aware that another election for your office is coming up soon... and I can think of no better person that Germany could have as its President ... than you.

(That is just an observation and not a paid political announcement.)

We thank you for being the man you are.

We thank you for all you have done in the past and all we know you will do in the future.

You should know, it is so appreciated by the Jewish people and all good people everywhere.

And we look forward to working together with you ... for a better Germany and a better Europe for all people.

Thank you, my friend.