

**Speech of Mayor Dr. Stephan Keller on the occasion of the Evening event of the First European Forum for Rabbis and Community Leaders on January 29, 2025, Leo Baeck Hall of the Jewish Community Düsseldorf**

***++The spoken word takes precedence++***

Ladies and Gentlemen -

Honored Rabbis, esteemed leaders of the Jewish community, and distinguished guests,

Just two days ago, on January 27, many of us gathered at the Deportation Memorial on Toulouser Allee. It was a profoundly moving occasion—a commemoration marking 80 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, a name forever etched into our collective memory as a symbol of humanity’s darkest chapter.

Standing there, alongside Marion Koebner, the granddaughter of Düsseldorf’s Rabbi Dr. Siegfried Klein—who was murdered in Auschwitz—I was struck by an overwhelming sense of responsibility.

Today, we find ourselves living in alarmingly uncertain times, where the specter of war and conflict is accompanied by the resurgence of a familiar and frightening threat: blatant anti-Semitism. It is not confined to one source—it arises from the far-left, the far-right, and extremist ideologies.

We live in a world where, once again, Jewish newspapers like the “Jüdische Allgemeine” are delivered in neutral envelopes to protect the identities of Jewish households. In some cities, Jewish individuals fear wearing their Kippahs on the street. We witness the horrifying return of arson attacks on synagogues, the marking of Jewish homes with Stars of David, and open hostility that echoes a history we swore never to repeat.

This is the same world we believed we had left behind 80 years ago when Auschwitz was liberated and soon after the Second World War came to an end. We had hoped that education, remembrance, and reckoning with the past could eradicate the seeds of hatred forever. Yet, despite our efforts, anti-Semitism persists. And since October 7, 2023, its resurgence has been alarmingly virulent, spreading like a plague across Europe and beyond.

Once again, we find ourselves at a crossroads in history where remembrance is not enough. Words and commemorations, however vital, must be accompanied by action—

uncompromising, unequivocal, and united. This unity must extend beyond our cities, states, and nations.

I want to mention at this point that I am deeply troubled because my own party has joined forces with a group that, at its core, is antisemitic and antidemocratic, and that is unacceptable.

Seeing so many rabbis and leading figures of the Jewish faith from across Europe gathered here in Düsseldorf fills me with hope. It is a powerful reminder of what you and your predecessors have achieved: the seemingly impossible task of rebuilding communities that were decimated to a fraction of their former selves by the Shoah.

Your resilience, your faith, and your unwavering dedication to your cities and congregations inspire confidence that we can continue to stand together and persevere. Here in Düsseldorf, I can personally attest to the deep bond between our city and its Jewish community. It is a relationship built not merely on tradition or respect but rooted in a shared history and an enduring commitment to justice and dignity for all.

This is why I feel so honored to speak at this First European Rabbi Forum. This evening is not only a celebration of Jewish life but also an opportunity to reflect on the profound responsibility we share to protect and nurture it.

I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to:

- Dr. Oded Horowitz, Chairman of the Jewish Community of Düsseldorf,
- Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, whose tireless advocacy and leadership were rightly recognized with the International Charlemagne Prize in 2024;
- Rabbi Levin, representing the many rabbis gathered here tonight;
- and
- Ms. Sylvia Löhrmann and Mr. Roland Römgens, for their steadfast support of our shared mission.

Your presence here today makes this gathering a testament to the resilience, and vitality of Jewish communities across Europe. Together, we reaffirm our commitment to a future that honors the past while safeguarding the dignity and safety of Jewish life for generations to come.

Düsseldorf is a city built on the foundations of diversity and inclusion. Among our most valued relationships is the one we share with our Jewish community, which enriches our city's cultural, spiritual, and social life. As your Mayor, let me reaffirm this promise:

Jewish life in Düsseldorf has a secure and honored place.

You deserve to live, work, and thrive without fear—whether outside the synagogue, in schools, on public transportation, or anywhere else in this city.

The past months have been deeply troubling for Jewish communities worldwide, and Düsseldorf has not been immune to these challenges. The rise in anti-Semitism, hate speech, and acts of violence since October 2023 is not only a dangerous trend, but an attack on the very values of tolerance and solidarity that define our society and the core of the European idea.

It is my personal belief that a strong and united European Union is the only way we can assure a prosperous and just future for our children and grandchildren. Jewish communities in Europe and beyond are a barometer of the health of a democracy. When democracy is strong, Jewish life flourishes. When democracy falters, it is the Jewish communities that suffer first.

Rabbi Goldschmidt, your leadership has been a light in these challenging times. As President of the Conference of European Rabbis, you have reminded us of the power of courage, and faith. Your recognition as the 2024 recipient of the International Charlemagne Prize is a tribute not only to you as a person, but to the enduring fight against anti-Semitism.

As I reflect on what brings us together today, I am reminded of a phrase that may seem overused but gets my point across quite well: “The opposite of love is not hate—it’s indifference.”

So, let me conclude by telling you that indifference is not an option for us. Not when history calls us to action. Not when Jewish newspapers need to be obscured for the safety of their readers, and a mother wonders whether her child can wear a Kippah to school without fear.

I share with you the hope that we leave this forum not only with ideas, but also with a renewed sense of purpose. Let us honor the stories of those who we have mourned again two days ago by committing to a future where hate finds no refuge.

Thank you!