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GERMANY: Scholz ‘ashamed’ at antisemitism wave on ‘Kristallnacht’ Day

GERMANY: Scholz ‘ashamed’ at antisemitism wave as ‘Kristallnacht’ pogrom marked

By Sarah Marsh and Andreas Rinke

Reuters (09.11.2023) – Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he was “ashamed and outraged” at a recent wave of antisemitic

incidents in Germany, warning Berlin would not tolerate such anti-Jewish hatred as he marked the 85th anniversary of the Nazis' "Kristallnacht" pogrom of Jews.

Scholz was speaking at a ceremony at a Berlin synagogue to mark "Kristallnacht" alongside Jewish leaders. The synagogue was among 1,000 that were damaged or destroyed across Germany and Austria by Nazi mobs during the "Night of Broken Glass" in November 1938.

At least 91 Jews were murdered, about 7,500 Jewish businesses ransacked and some 30,000 Jewish men and boys arrested during the assaults which preceded the Holocaust, or Shoah, in which about six million Jews were killed.

The synagogue where Scholz was speaking was also attacked with Molotov cocktails in a surge of antisemitic incidents that followed the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct. 7 and the subsequent Israeli retaliation.

In the week following Hamas's attack, watchdog RIAS reported 202 antisemitic incidents in Germany related to those attacks, a 240% increase from a year ago. Police said mosques were also targeted over the same period, with as many eight receiving parcels with torn-up Koran fragments mixed with fecal matter.

"Every form of antisemitism poisons our society," said Scholz, who was wearing a kippah, the traditional Jewish cap, as is customary in a synagogue for men. "We will not tolerate it."

Incidents of antisemitism have surged globally since the outbreak of the Israeli-Hamas war, causing particular soul-searching in Germany which has prided itself on its culture of remembering its dark past and drawing from it a historic duty to fight anti-Jewish hate.

A 10-minute video by German Economy Minister Robert Habeck expressing concern over rising antisemitism went viral last week. In it, he warned that Germans would have to answer for antisemitism in court, while anyone who was not German risked their residency status.

Indeed, new citizenship rules make clear that anyone who is antisemitic cannot receive German citizenship, Scholz said on Thursday.

Teaching about Germany's historic responsibility in the wake of the Holocaust is especially important as the generations who experienced it first hand are no longer around to share their testimony, Scholz said.

It is also important given the fact Germany is now a major destination for immigrants, and many immigrants have not learned about the Shoah in their countries of origin – or have learned about it differently, he said.

He added: "At the same time, we must not be taken in by those who are now seeing an opportunity to deny the place of more than 5 million Muslim citizens in our society."

"Never again" also means friendship with Israel, Scholz said.

"Israel has the right to defend itself against the barbaric terror of Hamas," he said, reiterating his government's commitment to do anything it can to ensure the release of the people taken hostage by the Palestinian Islamist group.

Jewish culture thrived in Berlin before the Nazis took power. It was one of the world's 10 largest Jewish centres, and many of Germany's leading scientists were Berlin Jews.

There were about 160,000 Jews in Berlin in 1933, when Hitler came to power, but only 1,400 in 1945 at the end of World War Two. The rest emigrated or were killed in death camps.

Reporting by Sarah Marsh and Andreas Rinke, editing by Thomas Escriitt and Bernadette Baum

Photo: Wikimedia

Further reading about FORB in Germany on HRWF website

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