

Speech by Mayor Reker on occasion of the reception of the Jewish Visitor Program on 10 November 2021

ES GILT DAS GESPROCHENE WORT!

The spoken word applies

Distinguished Ms. Tobar, Ms. Cordaro, Ms. Chanin and Ms. Gottschalkson,

Distinguished members of the Givati family,

Distinguished guests from politics, administration, culture, and our city's society,

Allow me to extend a warm welcome to all of you here in the City of Cologne's historic town hall on occasion of this very special reception. You as descendants of local residents of Jewish faith have come here to re-establish links with a family tradition, to get to know places, customs and people that are connected to your ancestors.

It is a great honor for me to receive you here today. It cannot be taken for granted that you accepted my invitation. Following the horrors your families suffered at the hands of Germans as well as people from Cologne, you might today experience a certain inner turmoil. On the one hand, this is the former home of your families with all their fulfilled and typical Cologne-style life. On the other hand, there is the pain of how this life was destroyed through pure hate legitimized by the government.

While you are here in Cologne you will have the opportunity of getting your own impression and I am very happy that we can provide support to you as our guests.

A particular local aspect of your ancestors' life was the so-called "Kleiner Kölner Klub" or Small Cologne Club – a Jewish carnival association. Founded by the brothers Max and Wilhelm Salomon during the 1920s, it focused on cultivating tradition like many other carnival associations. The members were in contact with other clubs, organized meetings and enjoyed a lively carnivalesque life, which was inherently similar to that of other carnival revelers.

However, after 1933, the Nazis would no longer tolerate this.

In the following years, a few members of the Kleiner Kölner Klub escaped from Europe, many others were murdered in the concentration camps. A loss of life, a loss of diversity, a loss for Cologne!

Dear guests, I am the daughter of Germans who lived here in 1933. They weren't Nazis – but yet they were enablers of these crimes. Because as many people, they were too afraid, to stand up against the violence. And that is why I feel the responsibility of standing up to hate, segregation, antisemitism, agitation, and all forms of these inhuman forces. It is with the deepest conviction that I say: Cologne has always been a multiethnic

city. Over the past 2000 years our history has been characterized by immigration, a variety of cultures and living together in diversity. As a result, this is the only city on the Rhine with over a million inhabitants.

Jews have played a crucial role in this development. Without them Cologne would not be what it is now!

This is precisely what the anniversary – “1700 years of Jewish life in Germany” points out to all of us. Over the past centuries, Jews were an integral part of our society. And this is again the case today, not least during carnival.

I am very happy that with the Kölsche Kippa Köpp around Aaron Knappstein we again have a Jewish carnival association. It deliberately draws on the history of the Kleine Kölner Klub. In this way, the association not only keeps alive the memory of your families, but it also keeps alive the tradition that was founded by them. I do hope that: At the end of the day, despite hate and antisemitism having caused horrific sorrow, they will not prevail! What has prevailed will be compassion and the belief in the strength of diversity!

I am extremely happy that with the Kölschen Kippa Köpp our carnival has become even more colorful.

And you, honored guests, top off this year's official kick-off to the official carnival season on November 11th by giving it a very special facet.

My sincerest gratitude for this and for being here with us.

I would like to thank all of you, but especially Aaron Knappstein for suggesting you as our guests today.

Dear guest, now I would be pleased and honoured, if you sign the guestbook of the City of Cologne so that we and the following generations will remember your visit.