

**Rede von Oberbürgermeisterin Henriette Reker anlässlich  
des Empfangs für ehemalige Kölnerinnen und Kölner  
jüdischen Glaubens und ihre Nachkommen am 17. Mai  
2023**

Es gilt das gesprochene Wort!

Distinguished Sam Oszkowsky,  
Distinguished Ms Heymann with your husband,  
Distinguished Mister Stahl Sommer with your wife,  
Distinguished council members, representatives of the Jewish  
communities in Cologne, honored guests,

welcome to the Historic City Hall of Cologne! It is a great honor  
for me to have you here today in the most representative  
location of our city.

You have come here to re-establish links with our city. 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 feel a certain  
discomfort.

On the one hand, this is the former home of your families. On  
the other hand, there is the pain of how this life was destroyed  
through pure hate.

One of the disturbing stories for me is that of the brothers  
Siegfried and Josef Sommer. They were well-established and

successful businessmen in Cologne. They fought for Germany in the First World War. They were fond of carnival and were not even particularly religious. They belonged to Cologne society as a matter of course.

And yet, out of sheer anti-semitism, they were expelled by their fellow citizens and ultimately driven out of the city.

A similar fate was experienced by your family, dear Sam Oszkowsky. Last week I already had the opportunity of accompanying you when “Stolpersteine” for your family were laid in the pavement. During the ceremony, I learned more about your biography: Your father was murdered in the Shoah. You and your mother managed to escape to the USA via Switzerland. Today, you are one of the very few former Cologne residents of the Jewish faith who can still tell us first-hand about that time.

Dear guests, it still escapes comprehension what was going on here in Cologne during the National Socialism. The mere facts are not enough to grasp this time. We can only begin to understand the incomprehensible and learn from it when we are faced with the actual fate of humans.

That is why I am so glad that we can re-connect with former Cologne residents and their families through your visits. I am convinced that ongoing contacts revitalize our culture of remembrance in Cologne. And I hope that this visit will also be

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

I understand this visitor program as aspect of our historical responsibility and I wish to make visits like this possible – now and in the future when contemporary witnesses will no longer be alive. And above all, your visit is a real matter of the heart to me because it touches my attitude and my own identity:

I am the daughter of Germans. They weren't Nazis – and yet they were enablers of these crimes. Because just like many people, they were too afraid, to take action against the violence. That is why I feel the responsibility of standing up to hate, antisemitism, agitation, and all forms of these inhuman forces.

It is with the deepest conviction that I say: Jewish citizens have played a crucial role in the history of this city. Without them Cologne would not be what it is now! And I am grateful, that 78 years after the end of the Shoa our Jewish communities are once again playing a visible role in the city's society.

Dear guests, yesterday you were already welcomed by the Cologne City Council. And today, some of the council members are here as well. We all look forward to the personal exchange with you. But before we start our conversation, I would like to

ask you to sign the guestbook so that we and the following generations will remember your visit!

I now wish to ask you to join me: Sam Oszkowsky, Ms Heymann and Mister Stahl Sommer.