

Funeral Oration Ulman Lindenberger at Dahlem Waldfriedhof

23 March 2023

Dear Ms (Secretary of State) Trasnea,
Dear Mr Ziegler,
Dear Mr Botmann,
Dear Ms Reinhardt,
Dear Mr Rauhut,
Dear mourners.

- Broken. Thrown away. Buried in holes in the ground. This is how human bone remains were found on the grounds of the former Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Anthropology, Human Heredity and Eugenics. Today we want to bury them with dignity.
- It is only a few hundred meters from the discovery site to the villa of Fritz Haber, the founding director of a neighboring Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, now the Fritz Haber Institute of the Max Planck Society.
- This Max Planck Society, for which I have the honor of speaking today as Vice President, was founded in 1948, exactly 75 years ago, as a new research organization in a democratic Germany. At the same time, however, it is heir to the Kaiser Wilhelm Society: in scientific terms and due to a wide range of personal and intellectual ties.
- The Max Planck Society needed time, a lot of time, to overcome the silence about the past, and especially about its own prehistory. It was not until June 2001 that a commission set up by the Max Planck Society invited to a scientific symposium in the Haber Villa.
- In addition to historians, the participants included eight survivors of the so-called twin experiments in the Auschwitz concentration camp, among them Ms Jona Laks, to whom I will come back later.

As children, these survivors had to endure suffering that exceed our ability of imagination.

- Today we know: Scientists at Kaiser Wilhelm Institutes exploited the unlimited research possibilities in Nazi forced institutions such as psychiatric clinics or the Auschwitz concentration camp in many different and cruel ways.
- During the event in the Haber Villa, Max Planck President Markl asked for forgiveness for the suffering inflicted on the victims of these crimes in the name of science. And he asked for apology for the fact that the Max Planck Society has done little, too little, for a long time to clarify the history of the Kaiser Wilhelm Society under National Socialism, and that it has accepted its historical responsibility only belatedly.
- With his acknowledgement of historical responsibility, the disclosure of guilt, the request for apology and the tribute to the victims, President Markl laid the foundation for how we should deal with our past in the present and in the future.
- At the Haber Villa, we formulated a commitment for the future: There must be no research goals that are considered so important and high-ranking that they justify the disregard of human dignity. Inalienable human rights and inviolable human dignity set limits to the freedom of science.
- Today's burial of bones of a larger number of victims of an inhuman, racist and criminal science shows that we are striving to live up to this responsibility.
- In close cooperation with the victims' associations, we have jointly decided to bury the human bone remains in an intercultural ceremony at Waldfriedhof Dahlem. The common ground in the burial represents a visible sign of our solidarity with all victim groups.

- Yesterday, I spoke on the phone with Jona Laks, the founder and chairperson of the organization of the Mengele twins. Jona Laks survived the twin experiments and the Holocaust. She is 93 years old and has been living in Tel Aviv for many years. The conversation with Jona Laks made it clear to me that there are also other, religiously motivated concepts about the form of honoring the victims and their burial. Together with the associations, we have tried to find a form of burial that is fair to all. But we should also remember today that some of the survivors would have wished for a different form. We ask all of them, and this is also what I did in my conversation with Ms Laks, for their understanding of the intercultural path that we have taken, as with think for good reasons.
- Today, the building of the former Kaiser Wilhelm Institute at Ihnestraße 22 belongs to Freie Universität Berlin and houses the Otto Suhr Institute for Political Science. The university wants to present the history of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in a permanent exhibition. It wants to design a place of remembrance and commemoration that shows the institute as the site of a science that transgressed ethical boundaries to research in the service of a murderous ideology.
- The Max Planck Society supports this project, and I would like to thank the Freie Universität for this important initiative. And I would also like to thank the Freie Universität Berlin and the Landesdenkmalamt Berlin for coordinating and organizing today's event.
- Dear mourners, two years ago, as Scientific Director of the Minerva Foundation, I visited the Israeli Memorial Yad Vashem. It houses a frieze with the following sentence: " Forgetfulness leads to exile, while remembrance is the secret of redemption ".
- For the Max Planck Society I can say: We will not forget. We will remember. This will be and remain our mission in the future.