

Dear Ms. Trasnea,

Dear Mr. Botmann,

Dear Ms. Reinhardt,

Dear Mr. Lindenberger,

Dear Mr. Rauhut,

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you all for coming here today in remembrance of the victims of Ihnestraße 22 as we lay them to rest.

“There are heinous deeds over which no grass grows,” writes Johann Peter Hebel at the end of his short story “The Hussar in Neisse.”

“There are heinous deeds over which no grass grows.”

Does this mean that there are some cases in which the ground will remain forever bare – in which the memory of the heinous act is so strong that it leaves a permanent scar?

“There are heinous deeds over which no grass grows.”

To my mind, this phrase also expresses a kind of wishful thinking. After all, grass has grown over countless misdeeds and atrocities already. Did grass not grow over the very bones that we are burying today? And might the grass not have grown over these atrocities, which we are gathered today to remember, anyway had history taken a different course? And what about the grass that continues to grow and grow, making it all the harder to identify the atrocities and keep them from falling into oblivion?

Unless we take action – this is both my fear and firm belief – unless we actively and constantly remember and recall the past, generation after generation, grass *will* grow over all misdeeds. So it is our duty – there is no denying it – to prevent the grass from growing. We must be persistent and unrelenting in our efforts. And no, it won’t be easy!

We are gathered here today to lay to rest the remains of some of those who fell victim to crimes committed in the name of science. Crimes that were carried out in particular at the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, which was located on Ihnestraße 22/24 in Dahlem from 1927 to 1945. Mr. Lindenberger will speak about the institute in more detail. But also other crimes committed elsewhere, not just there.

The human remains that we are burying today were discovered in excavations that began in 2015 on land right next to where Freie Universität Berlin’s University Library stands today. My predecessor as university president, Professor Peter-André Alt, responded to the discovery by setting up a working group with members from Freie Universität Berlin, the Max Planck Society, and the Berlin Heritage Authority. Their goal was to determine the origin of the remains as precisely as possible and decide what steps to take after that. Knowing the history of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute, there was already cause for suspicion from the very start that the remains that were found could be directly linked to

crimes committed during colonial times as well as Nazi crimes, especially those committed in the extermination camps at Auschwitz. Today, we can acknowledge the completion of this goal, and I would like to thank all the members of the working group for their hard work over the years.

Let me give you a brief overview:

Since 2015 there have been several excavations carried out for specific purposes and following precise scientific protocols. During these excavations, human remains were discovered. My personal thanks to Professor Pollock and Professor Bernbeck who oversaw the labor-intensive excavations. Early in 2022, a geophysical survey of the premises was conducted using radar to check for other anomalies in the ground, such as graves containing bones. The results of the survey did not produce any new findings.

After discussing the process in detail with the Central Council of Jews in Germany and the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, the human remains were carefully examined using osteological methods. Many thanks to Dr. Petiti and Dr. Gresky, as well as their colleagues from the German Archaeological Institute.

The analysis showed that the 16,000 bone fragments came from at least 54 individuals and included males and females from all age groups. Markings on some of the bones as well as a lack of indications that modern medical procedures had been carried out on the individuals allowed the working group to link the remains to anthropological and archaeological collections – and thereby also to criminal practices within a colonial context. However, taken as a whole, the human remains do not constitute a typical collection from those times. We have to assume that the bones and bone fragments originate from very different collections and contexts of the institute. In that respect, it was not possible to exclude a potential connection with Nazi crimes.

In February 2021, we invited the general public to a large online conference in order to inform them of the results of the investigation. We then carefully planned the next steps leading up to this memorial service in conversation with representatives from victims' associations and other organizations. We came to the decision together that the remains should not undergo any further examination. Any attempt to try to precisely identify which group certain remains belonged to would only reproduce the racialized methods and ideology of the past.

Even though we can't assign names or faces to the victims, we can still honor their memory. The joint decision was made to organize a memorial service – a dignified event in a non-religious and non-Eurocentric way.

This is not the place to elaborate on the details of the investigations and coordination work behind these developments. The printed program for today's memorial service includes information that we plan to also include on an information panel at the grave site. The panel will provide visitors with background information on the human remains that were found – unfortunately, we will have to wait to install it until a later date. It will include a link to a website with regularly updated content and additional information so that visitors can learn more about the circumstances surrounding these human remains.

The panel will also provide information about the site of remembrance that is currently being planned on Ihnestraße. Dr. Bauche is managing the project, "The History of Ihnestraße 22," and the exhibition that will be housed there. It will bring to light the history of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute of Anthropology, Human Heredity, and Eugenics, the institute's crimes, and the victims of those crimes. They plan to open the site in 2024. Ms. Bauche, I would like to thank you and your team for this important work!

“There are heinous deeds over which no grass grows”?

Ladies and gentlemen, we do not know the names, the faces, the identities, nor the unique stories of the individuals that we are laying to rest today. They were many. They are all victims of crimes committed in the name of science. We cannot allow the grass to grow over that; it is our duty to remember.

Allow me to make this point very clear: Freie Universität Berlin will continue to ensure that in the future no grass grows over crimes committed in the name of science. As a university community, we cannot and will not spare any efforts to this end. My conviction is all the stronger because I know that we have a close and committed relationship with the Max Planck Society in which we share a sense of responsibility as a community.

Thank you for coming here today to express your sympathy.