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**The London Conference on Combating Antisemitism,**  
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**(englisch)**

Ladies and Gentlemen, ...

1. I have been asked to speak to you about parliamentary activities in Germany to combat anti-Semitism, specifically about activities at the German Bundestag. As Vice-President of the Bundestag, as well as an active Member of the Bundestag for The Left Party parliamentary group, I am pleased to do so. I would therefore like to thank you for the invitation to this conference.
2. Around eighteen months ago, I tabled a parliamentary question. I wanted to know how many Jewish cemeteries had been desecrated over the previous few years in Germany. The answer given by the German Federal Government caused a media furore, because, statistically speaking, one Jewish cemetery per week was being desecrated.
3. Of course, it's a funny thing with the media. They get agitated about one thing today and by tomorrow they've moved onto the next thing. With a few exceptions, headlines are big, reporting is superficial and staying-power is minimal. And that was also true in this case. Yet the question remains: how did the Bundestag react in the face of these alarming statistics and the general agitation?
4. An informal working group was created, made up of Members from all the different parliamentary groups – CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, The Greens and The Left Party. And, incidentally, the initiator of the cross-party working group is a participant in this conference: Professor Gert Weisskirchen, who is also OSCE Representative on Combating Anti-Semitism.
5. I should like to add the following: studies have shown that fifteen to twenty-five per cent of the German population hold latent anti-Semitic views. This is not something new. And the situation in the other EU states is no different. Yet the Holocaust, or Shoa, was "made in Nazi Germany". This historically unique crime thus gives Germany a special responsibility.
6. Agreement existed on this point within the cross-party group. We also worked closely with NGOs committed to combating anti-Semitism. And we gained inspiration from parliamentary initiatives in other states, such as that led by John Mann from the British parliament.
7. Finally, we agreed on a goal. We wanted the Bundestag as a whole to pass a resolution on 9 November 2008, unanimously if possible. This is a symbolic date. Seventy years previously, the Nazi regime in Germany had launched open persecution of all Jews. In history books, this is referred to as the *Reichspogromnacht*, or Reich Pogrom Night.
8. The preparatory work we undertook in Parliament led to the drafting of a Bundestag resolution. This resolution is an appeal directed against any kind of Anti-Semitism. It calls for the promotion of diverse Jewish life in Germany. And it underlines Israel's right to exist. It also makes seven concrete demands of the Federal Government.
9. The resolution called upon the German Federal Government to establish a commission of experts. This commission is to investigate what tendencies towards anti-Semitism can be detected and report back to the Bundestag at regular intervals.

And it is to recommend options for political action to combat these tendencies. This is something new.

10. With this resolution, the Bundestag also adopted the OSCE's working definition of anti-Semitism. This was not merely a formal act. Rather, it was vital to ensure that anti-Semitic actions are perceived as such, are identified and condemned by society.
11. It was decided that federal funding would be provided for establishing and maintaining additional Jewish academic, cultural and societal institutions. This is more necessary than ever before; particularly since it very quickly became evident that the current global financial crisis is also drying up the flow of donations to Jewish institutions in Germany.
12. The Bundestag also proposed an expansion of school curricula to provide more scope for Jewish life and Jewish history. The same applies to the foundations of democracy and tolerance. The Center for Research on Anti-Semitism at the Technical University in Berlin has already done good work in paving the way for this.
13. Finally, the Federal Government was tasked with preventing incitement to anti-Semitism by foreign TV stations broadcast via satellite in Germany. This is not an easy topic, especially in the Internet era. But it is part of the spectrum of options for action decided on by the Bundestag.
14. Incidentally, the anti-Semitic TV programmes in question come from countries which are predominantly Muslim. I make no secret of the fact, though, that I am equally annoyed with the Pope. As the head of the Catholic Church, he has on a number of occasions sent anti-Semitic signals – whether intentionally or through negligence. And the fact that Benedict XVI comes from Germany makes this even worse.
15. Yet I do notice a difference, at least in Germany. Numerous low-level leaders of the flock in the Catholic Church have openly expressed their concerns about their spiritual leader. I would like to see a similar culture of protest against anti-Semitic relapses in the Islamic world. Such protest is in short supply there.
16. To return to the Bundestag's resolution: my ideas were and still are more far reaching and more concrete. I want to illustrate this to you by means of an example. The commission of experts which I mentioned is intended to report back "at regular intervals". "At regular intervals" can mean every ten years. So the Bundestag resolution leaves room for manoeuvre.
17. In addition: a new Bundestag is being elected in 2009. Some well-intentioned resolutions will get caught up in the whirlwind of the election campaign before then. This is particularly regrettable since the escalating Middle East conflict provides a breeding ground for old and new forms of anti-Semitism. This has been very obvious in Germany over the past few weeks.
18. I therefore want to make clear once again: I am definitely critical of Israel's military policy. But anti-Semitism has nothing to do with political criticism. Anti-Semitism is an ideology which holds human life in contempt. And nobody should be on the same side as those who are promoting an anti-Semitic agenda under the cloak of political criticism.
19. The Bundestag resolution mentioned above is a compromise. Nevertheless, it represents progress. Prior to this resolution, anti-Semitism was mainly a moral and symbolic issue in the Bundestag. But it could not truly be described as a political issue with real consequences. This may now change and I therefore welcome the

compromise in the Bundestag.

20. One thing is interesting. To begin with, specialised policymakers from all parliamentary groups got together. They agreed that we wanted to do something together to combat anti-Semitism. Our deliberations resulted in progress. A declaration by the Bundestag as a whole which we had worked towards seemed within reach.
21. Suddenly, some parliamentary groups changed their negotiating partners. The new representatives were less interested in joint action. They were more interested in enhancing the image of their own party in relation to the others. This was probably also an early example of election campaigning. A total of 19 elections are taking place in Germany in 2009.
22. In any case, this led to irritation and cast a shadow over our positive intentions. The consensus on wanting to fight anti-Semitism and foster Jewish life threatened to fall apart. Not surprisingly, this parliamentary farce was not well received in the Jewish community. This was something which I found regrettable.
23. Indeed, I would go further: I believe it is dangerous. Racism and anti-Semitism are always an attack on human dignity. Yet, in the battle to safeguard human rights, party rivalry is not very helpful. All democratic parties should be willing to work together, rather than working against one another. Because human dignity is inviolable for all people, with no exceptions.
24. In my political work, I strive to promote civil rights and democracy and to defeat right-wing extremism, racism and anti-Semitism. The principle I work on is that I neither want to be a "better kind" of anti-fascist, nor a "better kind" of friend to the Jews. I hope to achieve alliances within society, which should be as broad as possible.
25. Many alliances of this kind do exist in Germany, including, incidentally, between Israeli and Palestinian peace activists. I believe that fostering initiatives of this kind within society is one of Parliament's pre-eminent tasks. And it is also the least that we can do in the battle against latent anti-Semitism.

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