

**Madame Chancellor, Minister President Horst Seehofer,  
Lord Mayor Dieter Reiter and President Charlotte Knobloch, Chief Rabbi Lau, Rabbinic  
Colleagues, Your Eminencies, Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:**

Our gathering is one of Remembrance and Hope, remembering the destruction of synagogues throughout Germany and Austria on Kristallnacht, November 9 and 10, 1938 and hope for the future. The prophetic words of the great poet Heinrich Heine from his play 'Almanzor' in 1821': "*Dort, wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen*- Where they burn books, they will, in the end, burn human beings too" came true in front of my own eyes. In my birthplace, Vienna, I witnessed my very own synagogue set ablaze. The burning of synagogues was a prelude to the Holocaust of six-million Jewish men, women and children, including my grandparents and other family members exterminated in Auschwitz, Lublin and Terezín.

And yet here I am in democratic Germany, a survivor of the Holocaust, lauding a remarkable Chancellor, Angela Merkel, on the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the newly built Munich Synagogue. What a journey this has been; from tyranny to freedom and democracy.

Chancellor Merkel, you have lived under communist tyranny, emerging victorious spearheading the upholding the pillars of democracy, freedom and human rights. You had a good mentor, your father- of blessed memory, Horst Kasner, an evangelical pastor who inspired you with the teachings of the Bible: love your neighbor as yourself, mercy and compassion to the stranger and hearing the cry of the oppressed; we are all God's children deserving to be treated with respect, dignity, and humanity. You have applied these teachings far beyond your own country and have played a critical role as a pillar of strength of the European Union and authentic democracy, showing a keen understanding that we are all responsible for one another. With wisdom and heart, you have delivered Germany and the international community from the many geo-political and financial crises of the past decade with success and prosperity. For that, you have earned strong support from the German people and the world at large.

Germany and the United States today are guardians of freedom, democracy and human rights. They do so in a time when peace-wreckers are challenging the peace-builders-- often with the cynical manipulation of the name of God. Chancellor, you have said, "freedom is like air for the lungs".

The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be remembered as a time of *terror without borders* and a civilization burdened by an era of sophisticated incitement, enhanced by technology and advanced weapons of communication.

You have chosen and followed the path outlined by Moses Maimonides—the 12<sup>th</sup> Century renowned Jewish physician and philosopher—who established that *the golden path* of

moderation and balance is the most ideal one; you have done so successfully even in a world drifting in the sea of powerful and extreme waves. Just as freedom prevails over tyranny, *the golden path*, ultimately, will prevail over the waves of extremism.

Madame Chancellor: You are a woman of conscience and principle who has not waivered, you have been guided by the call of Micah, the prophet – “to pursue justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly before God” (6:8). In 2007, joined by Dr. Henry Kissinger, I had the distinct honor of bestowing upon you the interfaith Appeal of Conscience Foundation’s prestigious World Statesman Award in New York, recognizing your pivotal role in protecting freedom, democracy, human rights and tolerance.

Your outstanding leadership has been lauded by so many, from Time Magazine's person of the year, to Forbes' list of most influential women, to the outstanding number of awards you have received. (You are my nominee for a justifiable Nobel Peace Prize.)

Your Excellency, while we celebrate in this magnificent Tabernacle of Jacob, how sad that seventy years after the Holocaust, police have to guard synagogues. *Judenhass*– Jew-hatred which poisoned the minds of my classmates and their generation, has reared its ugly face once again in this generation. The destruction of any synagogue, church, mosque or temple is aimed at the jugular of any faith community.

Incitement of hatred used by demagogues to divide neighbor from neighbor does not threaten one group or the other; it threatens our humanity as a whole. History has shown that hatred and prejudice never stops in one place.

The thousand-year-old Jewish community of Germany, decimated by the Holocaust, is now home to over two-hundred thousand Jews, mostly Russian and Eastern-European, who found refuge in Germany. This has brought a revival of Jewish life in Germany. The Federal Republic of Germany is an example of remembrance and responsibility of a tragic past, and the spirit of reconciliation. A special relationship of understanding and cooperation with the Jewish people and the State of Israel has evolved over the years. Its foundation cannot, and will not, be distorted by those who use anti-Zionist rhetoric to hide their anti-Semitism.

With deep knowledge of history, you decided to join the United States, Britain, the Netherlands, Estonia and Latvia to oppose a revisionist distortion of history at UNESCO denying any reference to the Jewish and Christian presence at the sacred Temple Mount in the Holy city of Jerusalem; an insult to Christians and Jews alike, and anyone with a historical and ethical conscience.

As many nations are confronted with instability, turbulence and are drifting in a sea of conflict, you have not drifted. The last ten years as Chancellor of the Federal Republic, you have steered the German ship of state, the European Union, and Western societies to uphold the basic human values of civilization. You represent hope, confronting every storm with courage; not with defeatism and not succumbing to the ways of demagogues that bring havoc and destruction. *“Die ist kein Faenchen im Wind”- (“You don’t blow with the wind.”)*

An old German proverb says *“Anfangen ist leicht, Beharren eine Kunst—starting is easy, persistence is an art”*. Your Excellency, you have endured with a moral compass to courageously defend and advance the cause of humanity.

*Licht herrscht über der Dunkelheit*. Propelled with firm conviction you remind the world that light prevails over darkness and that with faith, hope, and perseverance we can build a brighter future. **You have made sure that the future cast its light on the past, rather than the past casting its darkness on the future.**

With our gratitude, it is an honor to present you with the Ohel Jacob Medal. I rejoice with you, esteemed friend. You are a blessing to the world; may God grant you health and strength to inspire us to help perfect an imperfect world that will bring peace and security on this planet.