

Deliberate Provocation by Polish Nationalists at Ravensbrück Once Again!

A Request for the Ravensbrück Memorial Site to Finally Act

Over recent years, celebrations commemorating the liberation of the Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp have been increasingly disrupted by Polish nationalists. And so it happened again this year, on April 22, 2018. Young men (for the most part) showed up openly wearing paramilitary clothing with nationalist symbols on armbands, while carrying flags and banners. Their usage of symbols was calculated, which they demonstrated by holding up the *Narodowe Siły Zbrojne* (Nationale Streitkräfte, NSZ) flag at the beginning of the Jewish Kaddish prayer. That particular organization is known for its murdering of Jews and Communists, as well as for its collaboration with Germans during and after the Second World War.

The director of the memorial site, Insa Eschebach, attested to the Europeanization of memorialization in her speech this year. However, instead of having the many diverse (national) flags of years past that marked the origins of the concentration camp prisoners, there is now just a sea of Polish displayed flags in front of her. In previous years, memorial site employees and visitors have been seriously threatened, berated, and photographed at the commemoration event. But this year, the situation escalated further. Several Polish nationalists stood directly in front of the banner of the Ravensbrück Camp Community and Friends in order to obscure it and the other antifascist flags around it. The nationalist group continued to grow and their demeanor was threatening. They continuously photographed the faces of those standing around the Ravensbrück Camp Community and Friends banner. When they were urged to roll up their nationalist banner and move further away, they reacted loudly and aggressively and it almost came to physical violence. The behavior of the Polish nationalists—and not just in this case—disturbed the memorial to such an extent that it made any kind of commemoration impossible for many of the visitors.

Some employees from the Ravensbrück Memorial Site institution tried in the moment to intervene in order to avoid the situation worsening further. However, no official action was taken by the Memorial Site institution. After the experiences of recent years, the Memorial Site announced last year that they were interested in developing a strategy to deal with this increasingly serious problem. Clearly, that did not take place. Quite the contrary: while last year's event invitation included a small comment stating that nationalist symbols were not welcome at the memorial, this year's did not.

We are calling on the Memorial Site to:

- protect their visitors (in particular survivors and their descendants) from right-wing, nationalist threats, and to create an atmosphere conducive to commemoration
- explicitly position themselves against nationalism, antisemitism, and racism in all its forms
- finally develop a comprehensive strategy to avoid future disruptions by nationalists
- make it clear in the invitation that nationalist symbols are not welcome
- exercise their property rights and expel nationalists from the memorial site if they refuse to cease their deliberate provocation (with corresponding symbols and behavior)
- design an invitation policy that gives more space to critical and progressive voices, instead of further strengthening representatives of reactionary, repressive, right-wing politics.

We think it is necessary to work together with the Ravensbrück Memorial Site, as well as others working in this area, in order to ensure that nationalism has no place at this location anymore—and especially not at commemoration events.

Some of the Members of the Initiative for a Memorial at the Former Uckermark Youth Concentration Camp

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