

Marking the anniversary of the Nazi Kristallnacht pogroms at the time of the Gaza War

By Adam Keller

Note: A few days ago I corresponded with a German friend, who told me that every year on November 9 he is involved in a local memorial ceremony for the Nazi Kristallnacht pogroms. But, he said, this year he is full of trepidation as to how the memorial will proceed, because "the discussion at the moment is extremely difficult and complicated" and people in Germany are so polarized about the war in Gaza (and the wider issues involved in it). I have tried to help him by offering the following text. (I did not yet hear how it actually went at the ceremony yesterday)

What happened on November 9, 1938 (and the even worse things which happened between 1938 and 1945) is a lesson for all human beings - and for Germans in particular - on how terrible racism and prejudice can be. This lesson needs to be learned again and again, every year, every day, because the danger is never over. It is very important to go on commemorating Nov. 9 in Germany, to look openly and honestly at the horrors of the German past, and to apply the lessons to the events of the present and to the prospects for the future.

An important element of remembering and commemorating Nov. 9 should be that no one - no individual person, no ethnic or religious group - is immune to racism and prejudice. Racism is always present somewhere deep in the mind, always seeking an outlet. A religious person might say it's Satan tempting us into evil, a secularist would look for psychological reasons. However you explain it, racism is there, it is never completely defeated, however much you strive against it and try to provide the best of Humanist and Universalist education.

A very important specific thing to remember is that having yourself suffered racism and oppression in no way makes you immune to becoming yourself a racist and oppressor - like a person who suffered abuse as a child might well grow up to abuse his own children. This is

applicable especially to the situation in the Middle East, between Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs - a wound which has been long festering and is now terribly bleeding.

We see that Jews, who had suffered from racism and oppression more terribly than any other people, are not immune to racism. Shamefully, it can be seen that racism is flourishing in the Jewish state of Israel, that there are organized Jewish racist parties which even gained representation in the government of Israel, parties led by demagogues who are busy spreading hatred and calling for the unrestrained killing of Palestinians, and actually - under this government - Israel is involved in bombing Gaza and killing thousands of civilians, including many children.

We see that Palestinians, who over decades suffered very much oppression and cruelty, are not themselves immune to oppression and cruelty. Shamefully, when some Palestinians for a single day this year found themselves in control of Israeli Jewish towns and villages, they perpetrated a series of terrible barbaric crimes, very shocking to anyone who sees the films which these Palestinians themselves made.

Of course, not everybody is caught up in terrible bloodlust. On both sides there are many decent people of good will. It is the duty of people of good will everywhere - and in particular, in Germany with its specific history - to do all they can to end the bloodshed and help create a better future for Israelis, Palestinians and everyone in the Middle East. This better future must be based on the principle that Israelis and Palestinians alike have rights which must be respected, including the right to sovereign statehood, and that neither one of them has a "right" to oppress or kill; no amount of suffering can confer such a "right". This year, when Nov. 9 falls on a time when passions from the Middle East are affecting German society, such should be the message and the lesson of the Nov. 9 commemoration,