

Memorial and Liberation Ceremonies 2018

Escape and Home

"We wish to ... follow a common path; the one of freedom – indispensable for every population, of reciprocal respect, of collaboration in the great work of constructing a new world that is free and just for all; We will forever remember the many terrible sacrifices that the conquest of this new world has cost for every nation." (Excerpt from the [Mauthausen Oath](#))

The Memorial and Liberation Ceremonies at Concentration Camp Memorial Mauthausen and at sites of its former satellite camps have been organized and conducted since 1946 by survivors and their organizations. As successor organization of the Austrian Association of Mauthausen Survivors (ÖLM), Mauthausen Committee Austria (MKÖ) has taken on this task. Again for 2018, on the occasion of the 73th anniversary of the liberation of concentration camp Mauthausen, in close cooperation with survivor organizations at national (ÖLM) and international levels (International Mauthausen Committee, CIM) MKÖ will be organizing the Ceremonies. Because over 90% of the victims were neither German nor Austrian, commemorating the victims of concentration camp Mauthausen and its satellite camps has international importance. **The International Memorial and Liberation Ceremony at Mauthausen is the largest Memorial and Liberation Ceremony worldwide.**

In addition to the Memorial and Liberation Ceremony in Mauthausen, each year many memorial ceremonies are held at sites of former satellite camps of concentration camp Mauthausen and other locations of Nazi terror. In 2017 **more than 90 memorial events** took place across Austria. Most of these events are organized by local associations and initiatives in close cooperation with Mauthausen Committee Austria (MKÖ). In all, the memorial and liberation ceremonies organized by MKÖ draw over **45,000 participants**, setting a clear signal for "Never again!"

Each year since 2006, the memorial and liberation ceremonies have been dedicated to a specific theme that relates to the history of concentration camp Mauthausen or to Austria's Nazi past. Direct relevance to today is an essential component of each of these themes; especially for young people, this is intended to establish links to their world of experience today through engagement with the era and ideology of national socialism. This year's memorial and liberation ceremonies are dedicated to the theme **"Escape and Home"**.

In 2000, the Austrian Association of Mauthausen Survivors officially transferred their [Legacy](#) to Mauthausen Committee Austria. This legacy forms the foundation of activities of MKÖ. In addition to commemorating the victims of Nazi crimes, especially crimes against those in concentration camp Mauthausen and its satellite camps, MKÖ focuses on activities against right-wing extremism and promotes anti-fascism and anti-racism work, particularly with young people. In recent years, MKÖ has conducted activities with **more than 100,000 young people**: civil courage training, accompaniment at Concentration Camp Memorial Mauthausen and sites of former satellite camps, discussions before and after visits to Concentration Camp Memorial Mauthausen, anti-racism workshops (e.g., "Wir sind alle" and the new topical tours "denk mal wien"), as well as various youth projects related to occasions and topics.

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“We lost our home, which means the familiarity of daily life. We lost our occupation, which means the confidence that we are of some use in this world. We lost our language, which means the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, the unaffected expression of feelings. We left our relatives in the Polish ghettos and our best friends have been killed in concentration camps, and that means the rupture of our private lives.” (Essay *“We refugees”*, Hannah Arendt 1943)

With Adolf Hitler’s seizure of power in 1933 in Berlin, the first people fled from the Nazis. The stream of refugees intensified with the introduction of the anti-Semitic Nuremberg Laws in 1935. The Anschluss (annexation) of Austria to Nazi Germany in March 1938 triggered riots against Jews in Austria. After the November pogroms in 1938, when the vulnerable Jewish minority was attacked with great brutality, it was clear that the Jewish population was defenseless in the German Reich. With the seizure of power and the Austrian Anschluss, the Nazis offensively pursued political opponents, trade unionists, members of Christian churches and other religions, other ethnic groups, homosexuals, intellectuals, artists and sooner or later anyone who rejected the Nazi regime. Already April 1938 saw the first transport of regime opponents from Vienna to concentration camp Dachau. In August 1938 the first prisoners arrived in Mauthausen, where the construction of the concentration camp began. In December 1938 there were nearly 1000 prisoners.

Beyond the political, religious and economic causes of refugee exodus, in the 1930s the Nazi terror regime created a new reason for the escape of refugees: racism. Waves of refugees crossed all of Europe to escape the death machinery of the Nazis. From one day to the next, families were broken up. The organization of Kindertransporten (children’s transports) to England from November 1938 until September 1939 rescued ca. 10,000 children and youths from Germany, Austria, Poland and Czechoslovakia. A lack of financial means coupled with strict immigration statutes in many countries prevented many people from fleeing; they were left victims to the Nazi extermination machinery. In various countries of Europe, many private initiatives attempted to negotiate more favorable conditions for refugees from Nazi Germany. The UN, refugee conventions and NGOs did not exist at that time.

The history of Europe since WWII is repeatedly marked by waves of refugees. Wars in former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria along with fundamentalist terror are two reasons for escape. Images of the huge waves of refugees in 2015 showed people dragging their children by the hand, with a minimum of possessions, looking for a place where their life is not in danger. What remains is the loss of friends, family, native language and culture. The popular term “home” is defined as “a place where one grew up or where one feels at home due to long-range residence.”

People who must flee across national borders have lost everything. War and terror have made their home a strange place. In the Nazi era, under the most difficult conditions people helped other people. Let us learn from history and follow the example of the liberated prisoners of concentration camp Mauthausen, whose Mauthausen Oath of 16 Mai 1945 expressed the values of international solidarity:

“The permanence in the camp, lasting years, has reinforced in our minds the knowledge of the value of brotherhood among the people of all nations.” (Excerpt from the [Mauthausen Oath](#))