

75 Jahre MUK: Gedenken, Restitution und Tafelenthüllung

Di, 26. April 2022

Rede von Nick Deyong

Good morning, my name is Nick Deyong and I am the greatgrandson of Dr Josef and Gusti Blauhorn and the step great grandson of Dr Franz Rudolf Bienenfeld, the brother of Else Bienenfeld. I would like to say a few words on behalf of my mother Susie and I hope also to convey what I believe would be the feelings of my late grandparents and greatgrandparents.

Gusti and Josef Blauhorn lived here in Vienna with their three children, Karl, Anni and Georg in the Villa Blauhorn at 54 Grinzinger Allee. Josef Blauhorn was head of one of the most prominent Jewish families in Vienna. He was for a time, the Managing Director of Gebrüder Guttman and was also a partner of Rothschild. Whilst they were Jews, they were proudly Viennese and contributed hugely to Austrian society and owned a collection of almost 300 works of art, mainly by Austrian artists. When Nazi Germany annexed Austria, they were forced to leave their home, all their possessions were stolen and they fled to Switzerland and subsequently to England with the help of Rudolf Bienenfeld.

Rudi as he was known, was president of the World Jewish Congress in Austria as well as our family lawyer and a close friend of Josef Blauhorn. After Rudi fled to England, he continued to fight to help Jews escape from Austria.

Unfortunately he was unable to locate his sister Else and he later found out that she had been murdered in the camps.

After the war, Rudi continued to fight for the rights of Austrian Jewish Refugees and was also instrumental in drafting the UN International Bill of Human Rights with a particular focus on the right of asylum to that anyone in the future, forced to flee their country could be assured safe haven abroad.

Rudi's wife Gretl died in 1938 and my great grandfather died later in 1944. Because they were both alone, Rudi and Gusti decided to marry and so he became step grandfather to my mother.

Coming here today has not been easy for my mother. Having spent her whole life as an only child, living with parents who were forced to leave the country that they loved, purely because they were Jews and having to live with the consequences of never knowing the truth because my grandparents were unable to speak about what happened creates many issues that only those people descended from victims of atrocity can understand.

After having their homes and possessions stolen by the Nazis and their loved ones murdered, the morally proper solution after the war would have been to return all stolen property to the rightful owners, automatically and without question, so that at the very least the surviving refugees could have the dignity of closure and the opportunity to repair their lives, but this was not the case. So far we have only received back a few paintings and continue to fight for the return of the others.

Our family along with countless others have been subjected to decades of denial and futile attempts by corrupt public officials to try to retain this stolen property and place the burden of the fight firmly in the hands of the victims and their heirs.

I cannot help but draw parallels with what is happening today in Ukraine and whilst we sit comfortably, getting on with our privileged lives, helpless to do anything about it, we know that the effects of this will unquestionably be passed on, not only to those affected today but also to future generations for decades to come.

This very institution was founded 75 years ago under Nazi ideals to the exclusion of Jewish teachers and students. I would like to thank Andi Mailath for inviting us here today and for having the courage and conviction to expose the truth by acknowledging the despicable consequences of mistakes from the past. I pray that present and future generations can learn from this and see first hand what is happening today so that we can create a new normal where all people feel accepted based on their values, talents and contributions to society and not by the colour of their skin, religious and political beliefs, sexual orientation or ethnicity.

We must not simply turn a blind eye to those in our midst who are suffering great injustices.

If one man could wield so much power over public opinion that he could turn an entire nation against a single group, based on their ethnicity, just imagine how the world would change if all people individually learned to spread love and kindness towards one another and accepted and embraced everyone by seeing greatness and potential in their differences.

This afternoon with thanks to Andi Mailat we are unveiling a plaque to the memory of my great grandparents whose family home was stolen and later restituted on the condition that they would sell it for a fraction of its value to the city of Vienna who razed it to the ground and replaced it with a sterile housing complex.

I would like to urge the city to go further than a plaque, by working with us to reverse the forced sale and return the property to us once and for all. We do not seek to benefit from this personally, instead we would like to see a charitable foundation established in my grandparents name and representing all victims of the holocaust so that their memory and legacy can benefit people in need, both now and in the future.

For me and my family, we now seek closure from the past. History may have stolen our inheritance but it will not steal our values or our dignity.

I would now like to recite a prayer which was written by the UK Chief Rabbi, Efraim Mervis, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby and Senior Imam Qari Asim on Holocaust Memorial Day.

Loving God, we come to you with heavy hearts, remembering the six million Jewish souls murdered during the Holocaust.

In the horrors of that history, when so many groups were targeted because of their identity, and in genocides which followed, we recognise destructive prejudices that drive people apart.

Forgive us when we give space to fear, negativity and hatred of others, simply because they are different from us.

In the light of God, we see everyone as equally precious manifestations of the Divine, and can know the courage to face the darkness.

Through our prayers and actions, help us to stand together with those who are suffering, so that light may banish all darkness, love will prevail over hate and good will triumph over evil.

Amen