

# HOLOCAUST DEFINITIONS

## **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, USA**

The Holocaust was the systematic, bureaucratic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. “Holocaust” is a word of Greek origin meaning “sacrifice by fire.” The Nazis, who came to power in Germany in January 1933, believed that Germans were “racially superior” and that the Jews, deemed “inferior,” were an alien threat to the so-called German racial community.

During the era of the Holocaust, German authorities also targeted other groups because of their perceived “racial inferiority”: Roma (Gypsies), the disabled, and some of the Slavic peoples (Poles, Russians, and others). Other groups were persecuted on political, ideological, and behavioral grounds, among them Communists, Socialists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and homosexuals.

# HOLOCAUST DEFINITIONS

L1

## Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel

The Holocaust was unprecedented genocide, total and systematic, perpetrated by Nazi Germany and its collaborators, with the aim of annihilating the Jewish people. The primary motivation was the Nazis' antisemitic racist ideology. Between 1933 and 1941, Nazi Germany pursued a policy that dispossessed the Jews of their rights and their property, followed by the branding and concentration of the Jewish population. This policy gained broad support in Germany and much of occupied Europe. In 1941, following the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Nazis and their collaborators launched the systematic mass murder of the Jews. By 1945, nearly six million Jews had been murdered.

# HOLOCAUST DEFINITIONS

## Imperial War Museum, London, UK\*

‘The Holocaust’ is the term used to describe the systematic and wholesale slaughter of the Jews of Europe by the Nazis and their collaborators during the Second World War. Two-thirds of European Jewry perished between 1939 and 1945.

On coming to power in 1933, the Nazis began to actively persecute the Jews of Germany with the introduction of discriminatory legislation which was accompanied by vicious antisemitic propaganda. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the process escalated. Nazi conquests meant that every Jew in occupied Europe was under the threat of death.

Other groups besides the Jews fell victim to Nazi racial policies. Poles, Slavs, Soviet prisoners of war, Roma and Sinti (gypsies), were all murdered in vast numbers. And Hitler’s political opponents, communists and trade unionists, Jehovah’s Witnesses and homosexuals were also brutally done to death in Nazi concentration camps.

---

\*This definition has been abridged, specifically the third paragraph has not been included. No other changes have been made. The complete definition is available at [iwm.org.uk/history/the-holocaust#](http://iwm.org.uk/history/the-holocaust#).

# GENOCIDE DEFINITION

L1

In 1948, the United Nations defined genocide as any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial, or religious group, including

- killing members of the group
- causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- forcibly transferring children of the group to another group

# HEYDRICH'S INSTRUCTIONS, NOVEMBER 1938

*Secret*

*Copy of Most Urgent telegram from Munich, of November 10, 1938, 1:20 A.M.*

To  
All Headquarters and Stations of the State Police  
All districts and Sub-districts of the SD [Security Service]

*Urgent! For immediate attention of Chief or his deputy!*

*Re: Measures against Jews tonight*

Following the attempt on the life of Secretary of the Legation vom Rath in Paris, demonstrations against the Jews are to be expected in all parts of the Reich in the course of the coming night, November 9/10, 1938. The instructions below are to be applied in dealing with these events:

1. The Chiefs of the State Police, or their deputies, must immediately upon receipt of this telegram contact, by telephone, the political leaders in their areas *Gauleiter* or *Kreisleiter*—who have jurisdiction in their districts and arrange a joint meeting with the inspector or commander of the Order Police to discuss the arrangements for the demonstrations. At these discussions the political leaders will be informed that the German Police has received instructions, detailed below, from the *Reichsfuehrer* SS and the Chief of the German Police, with which the political leadership is requested to coordinate its own measures:
  - a. Only such measures are to be taken as do not endanger German lives or property (i.e., synagogues are to be burned down only where there is no danger of fire in neighboring buildings).
  - b. Places of business and apartments belonging to Jews may be destroyed but not looted. The police is instructed to supervise the observance of this order and to arrest looters.
  - c. In commercial streets particular care is to be taken that non-Jewish businesses are completely protected against damage.
  - d. Foreign citizens even if they are Jews are not to be molested.
2. On the assumption that the guidelines detailed under para. 1 are observed, the demonstrations are not to be prevented by the Police, which is only to supervise the observance of the guidelines.
3. On receipt of this telegram Police will seize all archives to be found in all synagogues and offices of the Jewish communities so as to prevent their destruction during the demonstrations. This refers only to material of historical value, not to contemporary tax records, etc. The archives are to be handed over to the locally responsible officers of the SD.
4. The control of the measures of the Security Police concerning the demonstrations against the Jews is vested in the organs of the State Police, unless inspectors of the Security Police have given their own instructions. Officials of the Criminal Police, members of the SD, of the Reserves and the SS in general may be used to carry out the measures taken by the Security Police.

- L1
5. As soon as the course of events during the night permits the release of the officials required, as many Jews in all districts, especially the rich, as can be accommodated in existing prisons are to be arrested. For the time being only healthy male Jews, who are not too old, are to be detained. After the detentions have been carried out the appropriate concentration camps are to be contacted immediately for the prompt accommodation of the Jews in the camps. Special care is to be taken that the Jews arrested in accordance with these instructions are not ill-treated....

signed Heydrich,

*SS Gruppenfuehrer*

---

Reprinted with permission from Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, Abraham Margalio, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), 102–104. All rights reserved.

# LETTER BY MARGARETE DREXLER TO THE GESTAPO

Mannheim, 24 November 1938  
Margarete Drexler, Landau Pfalz Suedring St. 10

To the Secret State Police Landau (Pfalz) The sum of 900 Marks\* in cash was confiscated from me in the course of the action of 10 November. I herewith request to act for the return of my money, as I need it urgently for me and my child's livelihood. I hope that my request will be granted, as my husband died as a result of his injuries during the war—he fought and died for his fatherland with extreme courage—and I am left without any income. Until recent years you could have found a photo of my husband on the wall next to the picture of Generalfeldmarschall von Hindenburg in the canteen of the 23 Infantry regiment in Landau. This was done to honour his high military performance. His medals and decorations prove that he fought with great courage and honour. He received: The Iron Cross First Class, The Iron Cross Second Class, The Military Order of Merit Fourth Class with swords. The Military Order of Sanitation 2 class with a blue-white ribbon. This ribbon is usually bestowed only upon recipients of the Max Joseph Order, which accepts only members of the nobility. I can only hope that as a widow of such a man, so honoured by his country, my request for the return of my property will not be in vain.

With German greetings,  
(signed) Frau Margarete Drexler Widow of reserve staff surgeon Dr. Hermann Drexler  
Presently in Mannheim, 11 Kant St.

Enclosed: 6 photos of medals and decorations.

*\*In 1938, 2.49 Marks = \$1.00 U.S.*

[NOTE: Margarete Drexler was deported to France in October 1940 with the other Jews of the Pfalz area. She died in the Gurs camp. The date of her death is unknown.]

---

Reprinted with permission from Yad Vashem Archives O.51/81. All rights reserved.

# DESCRIPTION OF THE RIOT IN DINSLAKEN

Yitzhak S. Herz

L1

...I recognized a Jewish face. In a few words the stranger explained to me: "I am the president of the Jewish community of Duesseldorf. I spent the night in the waiting-room of the Gelsenkirchen Railway Station. I have only one request—let me take refuge in the orphanage for a short while. While I was traveling to Dinslaken I heard in the train that anti-Semitic riots had broken out everywhere, and that many Jews had been arrested. Synagogues everywhere are burning!"

With anxiety I listened to the man's story; suddenly he said with a trembling voice: "No, I won't come in! I can't be safe in your house! We are all lost!" With these words he disappeared into the dark fog which cast a veil over the morning. I never saw him again.

In spite of this Job's message I forced myself not to show any sign of emotion. Only thus could I avoid a state of panic among the children and tutors. Nonetheless I was of the opinion that the young students should be prepared to brave the storm of the approaching catastrophe. About 7:30 A.M. I ordered 46 people, among them 32 children, into the dining hall of the institution and told them the following in a simple and brief address: "As you know, last night a Herr vom Rath, a member of the German Embassy in Paris, was assassinated. The Jews are held responsible for this murder. The high tension in the political field is now being directed against the Jews, and during the next few hours there will certainly be anti-Semitic excesses. This will happen even in our town. It is my feeling and my impression that we German Jews have never experienced such calamities since the Middle Ages. Be strong! Trust in God! I am sure we will withstand even these hard times"....

After breakfast the pupils were sent to the large study-hall of the institution. The teacher in charge tried to keep them busy. At 9:30 A.M. the bell at the main gate rang persistently. I opened the door: about 50 men stormed into the house, many of them with their coat- or jacket-collars turned up. At first they rushed into the dining room, which fortunately was empty, and there they began their work of destruction, which was carried out with the utmost precision. The frightened and fearful cries of the children resounded through the building. In a stentorian voice I shouted: "Children, go out into the street immediately!" This advice was certainly contrary to the orders of the Gestapo. I thought, however, that in the street, in a public place, we might be in less danger than inside the house. The children immediately ran down a small staircase at the back, most of them without hat or coat despite the cold and wet weather. We tried to reach the next street crossing, which was close to Dinslaken's Town Hall, where I intended to ask for police protection. About ten policemen were stationed here, reason enough for a sensation-seeking mob to await the next development. This was not very long in coming; the senior police officer, Freihahn, shouted at us: "Jews do not get protection from us! Vacate the area together with your children as quickly as possible!" Freihahn then chased us back to a side street in the direction of the backyard of the orphanage. As I was unable to hand over the key of the back gate, the policeman drew his bayonet and forced open the door. I then said to Freihahn: "The best thing is to kill me and the children, then our ordeal will be over quickly!" The officer responded to my "suggestion" merely with cynical laughter. Freihahn then drove all of us to the wet lawn of the orphanage garden. He gave us strict orders not to leave the place under any circumstances.

Facing the back of the building, we were able to watch how everything in the house was being systematically destroyed under the supervision of the men of law and order, the police. At short



intervals we could hear the crunching of glass or the hammering against wood as windows and doors were broken. Books, chairs, beds, tables, linen, chests, parts of a piano, a radiogram, and maps were thrown through apertures in the wall, which a short while ago had been windows or doors.

In the meantime the mob standing around the building had grown to several hundred. Among these people I recognized some familiar faces, suppliers of the orphanage or tradespeople, who only a day or a week earlier had been happy to deal with us as customers. This time they were passive, watching the destruction without much emotion.

At 10:15 A.M. we heard the wailing of sirens! We noticed a heavy cloud of smoke billowing upward. It was obvious from the direction it was coming from that the Nazis had set the synagogue on fire. Very soon we saw smoke-clouds rising up, mixed with sparks of fire. Later I noticed that some Jewish houses, close to the synagogue, had also been set alight under the expert guidance of the fire-brigade. Its presence was a necessity, since the firemen had to save the homes of the non-Jewish neighborhood....

In the schoolyard we had to wait for some time. Several Jews, who had escaped the previous arrest and deportation to concentration camps, joined our gathering. Many of them, mostly women, were shabbily dressed. They told me that the brown hordes had driven them out of their homes, ordered them to leave everything behind and come at once, under Nazi guard, to the schoolyard. A stormtrooper in charge commanded some bystanders to leave the schoolyard “since there is no point in even looking at such scum!”

In the meantime our “family” had increased to 90, all of whom were placed in a small hall in the school. Nobody was allowed to leave the place. Men considered physically fit were called for duty. Only those over 60, among them people of 75 years of age, were allowed to stay. Very soon we learned that the entire Jewish male population under 60 had already been transferred to the concentration camp at Dachau....

I learned very soon from a policeman, who in his heart was still an anti-Nazi, that most of the Jewish men had been beaten up by members of the SA before being transported to Dachau. They were kicked, slapped in the face, and subjected to all sorts of humiliation. Many of those exposed to this type of ill-treatment had served in the German army during World War I. One of them, a Mr. Hugo B.C., had once worn with pride the Iron Cross First Class (the German equivalent of the Victoria Cross), which he had been awarded for bravery....

---

Reprinted with permission from Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, Abraham Margalio, eds., *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1981), 104–107; and *Yad Vashem Studies XI* (1976):345–349. All rights reserved.

# MAGDEBURG, GERMANY, NOVEMBER 10, 1938

L1



Yad Vashem Photo Archive (135GO1)

# SIEGEN, GERMANY, NOVEMBER 10, 1938

L1

