



## **FIZnews**

### **International Holocaust Remembrance Day: Remembering means taking responsibility**

*Karlsruhe, January 29, 2026* — On International Holocaust Remembrance Day, one central concept repeatedly comes to the fore: remembrance. What does it mean to remember? Remembering is not a state that one achieves once and then preserves. It is an attitude that we must consciously adopt again and again. January 27 makes this particularly visible. It commemorates not only a historical turning point, but also a responsibility that continues to have an impact. This responsibility is not, as is often misleadingly stated, a collective guilt of the current generation. It is something that we as Germans actually bear collectively and must constantly remind ourselves of. It becomes particularly noticeable in times when democratic principles are becoming more fragile and anti-democratic forces are gaining influence. In such moments, responsibility means not being content with ritualized remembrance, but making visible the conditions under which injustice became possible and can become possible again and again.

National Socialist rule was not an exceptional situation beyond any social normality. It was sustained by conviction and conformity, by ideological radicalism as well as administrative routine. Hannah Arendt described this with the concept of the banality of evil (1961): not to trivialize the crime, but to point out its dangerous everyday nature. This is precisely why remembrance must not remain abstract; it must become concrete. It must show how injustice was organized, how it was reflected in responsibilities, administrative processes, forms, files, and procedures.

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**Page 1 of 4**



As part of the German scientific landscape and as an institute for information infrastructure, we at FIZ Karlsruhe bear a special form of responsibility. Not through moral interpretation, but through the infrastructure for contemporary documentation and presentation in the digital space. Because memory and responsibility move in many ways. The path that we at FIZ Karlsruhe are taking together with our partner archives leads to securing historical documents, making them accessible, and making them available online worldwide so that memory remains accessible and verifiable.

### What does reparation mean after 1945?

After the end of Nazi rule, Germany and the Allies faced a truly historic task: coming to terms with a state-organized rupture of civilization. It was clear early on that there could be no adequate response to something so extraordinary, neither morally nor legally. Nevertheless, since 1945, the idea of possible reparations has gradually developed, not as compensation for suffering, but as an attempt to take political, legal, and material responsibility.

The central reference point in the history of reparations is a government statement made by Konrad Adenauer in September 1951, in which he acknowledged the moral obligation of the Federal Republic of Germany towards the Jewish victims of National Socialism. This led to international agreements and comprehensive legal regulations on restitution and compensation. These processes spanned decades, underwent multiple reforms, and remained controversial. Not least because they translated individual suffering into administrative categories that were inevitably inadequate. The concept of reparations was therefore ambivalent from the outset. No one could make amends for what was irretrievably lost: human lives, families, life paths. Reparations were intended rather to signify a state effort to make responsibility visible and to give recognition. Incomplete, belated, and often fraught with conflict.

This is precisely why the surviving sources are of particular importance. They document not only state action, but also the experiences of those who survived persecution and had to go through the proceedings again. Reparation becomes tangible here as a historical process which, through the documentation of these administrative procedures, makes it possible to paint an initial picture of the systematic nature of disenfranchisement.

### 100 kilometers of files against forgetting and denial



The thematic portal "Compensation for National Socialist Injustice," developed on behalf of the Federal Ministry of Finance and integrated into the Archive Portal D of the German Digital Library, makes these processes accessible for the first time. FIZ Karlsruhe brings together key sources on the history of redress: legal foundations, institutional responsibilities, and, above all, individual case files from federal and

state archives. FIZ Karlsruhe, together with the Federal Archives and the State Archives of Baden-Württemberg, is responsible for the technical design, implementation, and operation of the portal. At the same time, we are focusing on the automated indexing of large historical document collections and contributing our scientific expertise, for example through text recognition, structuring, and semantic enrichment processes.

How should we imagine this work? First of all, with an almost unimaginable amount of files, totaling over 100 kilometers of shelf length. A typical reparations file contains numerous documents: handwritten applications, official correspondence, medical reports, decisions, appeals. It tells individual life stories and at the same time shows how an administrative system works. Through digitization and structured indexing, these files are not only preserved, but also placed in a larger context. The right to accessibility is particularly important here. With specially developed, low-threshold systems, FIZ Karlsruhe also enables smaller archives to contribute their holdings to the portal.

### Responsibility in the present: the "Right-wing Violence" theme portal

The responsibility that arises from history is not only directed backwards, but also concerns the present. With the thematic portal "Right-Wing Violence," which we are currently developing on behalf of the Federal Government Commissioner for Culture and the Media, also with partnering archives, this claim is being consistently pursued. The portal documents right-wing motivated acts of violence in the Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR from 1945 to the present. Here, too, the aim is not merely to list events, but to contextualize them: chronological developments, regional focal points, archival sources. The technical and conceptual experience gained from the Compensation portal is being directly incorporated into this project. It makes it clear that right-wing extremist violence is not a closed chapter, but an ongoing challenge for a democratic society.

Remembrance is not an end in itself. It is a form of responsibility towards the victims and towards the future. Within our area of expertise, we contribute to ensuring that remembrance remains accurate, verifiable, and resistant to simplification. Remembrance is not where responsibility ends. It is where it begins.

<https://www.fiz-karlsruhe.de/de/projekte/themenportal-wiedergutmachung-nationalsozialistischen-unrechts>

<https://www.fiz-karlsruhe.de/de/projekte/themenportal-rechte-gewalt>



information infrastructures, with, for example, a focus on research data management, knowledge graphs and digital platforms. To this end, we conduct our own research, cooperate with renowned universities and research associations and are internationally and interdisciplinarily networked. FIZ Karlsruhe is a non-profit limited liability company and one of the largest non-academic institutions of its kind. For more information, please visit [www.fiz-karlsruhe.de/en](http://www.fiz-karlsruhe.de/en)

**Page 4 of 4**

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