

Speech at the inauguration of Ruth Lindenbaum Plaza

Unna, 28. Oktober 2025

Thinking about today, I rummaged through my memories. The first time I consciously heard about the *Holocaust*, I was about twelve years old—the same age **Ruth Lindenbaum** was when the devastating fascist disaster was brewing over her in Unna.

Back then, in 1979, the TV series *Holocaust* was on. I wasn't allowed to watch it because it was too cruel. But my mother told me about it – she cried.

For the first time, I sensed that something monstrous must have happened in Germany – something unimaginably cruel and deeply inhuman.

These feelings and thoughts never left me – even as I grew older and learned more and more about the horrors of the Shoah.

And I grew older...

A good thirty years later – when I was entrusted with laying the first Stolpersteine in Unna by the cultural office – I had the opportunity to meet **Manfred Lindenbaum** and his family.

Together we visited the Jewish cemetery and the memorial stone bearing **his sister's name**.

This encounter touched me deeply. Many tears were shed – including mine.

Suddenly, all the stories from the history books became very real. I could literally feel the loss that this city had inflicted on itself.

Perhaps we would have gone to school together.

Perhaps we would have met for coffee at the market.
Perhaps you would have become my teacher, my doctor, or my friend
– or even my family.

I had to think about that – about all the people and their descendants
whom we could never get to know because they were driven out of
Unna and murdered.

And not by strangers, but by ordinary citizens – by neighbors, friends,
teachers, colleagues, local politicians, and their accomplices.
People who, in some cases, continued to live in Unna unmolested
after the war.

**The history of the perpetrators in Unna is still far from being fully
addressed.**

What a loss.

A loss that no one can make up for.
A guilt that Unna has been confronting for many years through its
culture of remembrance.

**Culture is what connects us as human beings – across generations,
languages, and borders.**

It gives us the tools to express the unspeakable and the strength to
create a future from memory.

Today shows that:
with the inauguration of **Ruth-Lindenbaum-Platz**, we are taking
responsibility – supported by a unanimous political decision in the
culture committee.
We are bringing a warning reminder right to the doors of our new
education center.
And I am very grateful to you, Herr Rosenberg, for immediately
supporting the naming without hesitation during our long phone call.

We show respect for the survivors and their pain – and we send a message to everyone who passes by, learns, and lives here.

The children who go to school or daycare here today are growing up with this memory.

They learn that there was once a girl in Unna who was torn from her everyday school life simply because she was Jewish. She had done nothing wrong to anyone.

A girl who was no longer allowed to sit next to her friends in class – who had to flee – and who did not survive.

The children do not have to secretly peek through the crack in the door at the television to learn about the Holocaust, as I did back then. Through Ruth Lindenbaum, they learn that remembrance gives rise to responsibility – and that responsibility can lead to a good future.

That is Ruth's legacy for Unna.

And it will be the children who shape our future together.

It must NEVER happen again.

But until then, it is still our responsibility as adults to be role models for them.

Ruth-Lindenbaum Platz is more than just a name on a sign. It is a symbol – a place that reminds us to look, to ask questions, and to speak up.

And it is a place that gives us hope – because we are standing here today, together, with open hearts, with responsibility and compassion.

Dear Manfred Lindenbaum...and family,

I admire you for the conciliatory spirit with which you greet us here in Unna – and in Germany – and at the same time, as a resident of Unna, I ask your forgiveness for what was done to you and your family in our city long ago.

We cannot undo what happened.
But we can prevent it from being forgotten.
We can ensure that humanity, tolerance, and moral courage are the values that guide our actions—in this city, in our schools, in our families.

**May this place always remind us
that remembrance is not looking back,
but a way forward.**

I would like to conclude with a word that celebrates hope and life – a word from the Jewish tradition: L'Chaim – to life!

Claudia Keuchel, Chair of the Culture Committee

(Translated with DeepL.com (free version))