

**Remembering for the future – working for reconciliation and peace:  
Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge  
(German War Grave Commission)**

**Statement from the national representative meeting in Göttingen on 23-24 September 2016**

Our country's future is closely linked to the future of Europe. It can only go well if people get along with one another, if they resolve their conflicts without using violence and if peace between nations is secured. The War Graves Commission feels deeply committed to this goal.

**The mission statement adopted at Göttingen 2016 defines the direction for its work over the next few years. The German War Grave Commission**

- **is looking for German victims of war and is recovering, identifying and burying them;**
- **also keeps an eye on other victims of war and tyranny, in addition to fallen soldiers, not least those who lost their lives due to persecution, racial hatred, fleeing and displacement;**
- **supports the relatives of the victims;**
- **makes an important contribution to German memorial culture;**
- **sees remembrance as a task for Europe and organises this through close collaboration with institutions at home and abroad;**
- **participates in education inside and outside of school with diverse projects, particularly working with young people at the graves towards reconciliation and peace.**

The German War Grave Commission works – also in the former East German states since 1990 – as a civic organisation within the framework of obligations under international law, on behalf of the German Bundestag and the Federal government. It therefore has an obligation to the public and the state, which is still predominantly financed by private funds. However, the number of people alive in the war and who were children in the war is decreasing. This is why voluntary contributions are also drying up significantly. The Volksbund will continue to intensively strive towards support from the population. Nevertheless **in the next few years, the state will be increasingly required to support its work.**

The existence of war cemeteries must be permanently secured in accordance with the Geneva Convention of 1949 and the German Grave Act of 1952 and the following years. The Volksbund has over 830 war cemeteries abroad in its care. Community, ecclesiastical and other supporters of the cemeteries are on hand to help and support them in shaping the approximately 15,000 domestic war cemeteries. In the last 25 years it has transferred well over 850,000 victims to countries in the old Eastern bloc, many of whom were identified and their families informed. Even 70 years after the end of the Second World War the work is far from over.

The graves of war victims are places of individual mourning. It is there where people remember their dead relatives. But these graves also serve as a place for collective remembrance, they express our country's memorial culture. Because of the nature of the Second World War, they can never be a place for nationalistic hero worship.

The Volksbund's work at soldiers' graves complements the work done by numerous other organisations and institutions at memorial places and remembering victims. It also takes into account complex remembrance that result from the fact that soldiers could have been victims or perpetrators, or both at the same time.

The war cemeteries and memorial sites from the First World War, for which Germany was partly responsible and the Second World War, conducted with attacks and a war of annihilation in the East by Nazi Germany, are places of increased obligation and clarification for us Germans.

The Volksbund opposes allocating general blame in line with the view of the German parliament. It orientates its presentations and educational work towards historical research, therefore contributing to working out guilt and responsibility in its historical and political contexts.

**The Volksbund work does not concentrate on the past. It works towards facilitating and encouraging learning for the future.** It works closely together with associations and institutions at home and abroad, not least in the education sector.

That's why in the last few years, in addition to work relating to war graves, victims and their relatives, school, extracurricular and adult education have become increasingly more important for self-perception and action. This area of work is being developed further.

For more than 20 years, the Volksbund has contributed to public discourse through relevant publications, commemorative meetings, public discussions, new forms of Remembrance Day by participating with youths, conferences with foundations, communities, teaching associations, universities and other organisations.

The Volksbund runs four youth meeting and education centres – three of which are in nearby European countries and another one at home. **It will enhance these activities that aim to familiarise youth with the horrors of war and the need for peace and understanding.**

To be able to perform these tasks in a committed and competent way, the Volksbund has been undergoing a reform over the last few years and will continue this change process consistently in the future. It would like to ask all people, civic institutions and government agencies, for whom peace is a concern, to actively support it.