

<https://www.businessinsider.com/germanys-merkel-voices-shame-during-1st-auschwitz-visit-2019-12>

**Angela Merkel expressed 'deep shame' on her first visit to Auschwitz in her 14 years as German chancellor**

---

**AP**



Angela Merkel's visit to Auschwitz on Friday was her first as German chancellor. She assumed the office 14 years ago. [Omar Marques/Getty](#)

- **German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Friday visited Auschwitz, the death camp in Nazi-occupied Poland where more than a million people were murdered during World War II.**
  - **She expressed a "deep shame" at the genocide that the German Nazis carried out and brought a donation of 60 million euros to fund conservation efforts at the site.**
  - **It was the first time in her 14 years as chancellor that Merkel visited the former death camp.**
  - **[Visit Business Insider's homepage for more stories.](#)**
- 

OSWIECIM, Poland — German Chancellor Angela Merkel voiced a feeling of "deep shame" on Friday during her first visit to the hallowed grounds of the former Nazi German death camp of Auschwitz-Birkenau, where Adolf Hitler's regime murdered more than a million people.

Merkel noted that her visit came amid rising anti-Semitism and historical revisionism and vowed that Germany would not tolerate anti-Semitism. She said Germany remained committed to remembering the crimes that it committed against Jews, Poles, Roma and Sinti, gay people, and others.

Speaking with a gathering that included former Auschwitz inmates, she said she felt "deep shame in the face of the barbaric crimes committed by Germans here."



Merkel on the train tracks that the Nazis used to ferry hundreds of thousands of Jews to the Auschwitz death camp in Poland. [Markus Schreiber/AP](#)

"Nothing can bring back the people who were murdered here," she said. "Nothing can reverse the unprecedented crimes committed here. These crimes are and will remain part of German history and this history must be told over and over again."

She called such responsibility a key element in German national identity today.

Merkel also brought a donation of 60 million euros, or \$66.6 million. The money will go to a fund to conserve the physical remnants of the site — the barracks, watchtowers, and personal items like shoes and suitcases of those killed.

Together, those objects endure as evidence of German atrocities and as one of the world's most recognizable symbols of humanity's capacity for evil. But they also are deteriorating under the strain of time and mass tourism, prompting a long-term conservation effort.



Merkel said she felt a "deep shame" visiting the site of the German-led genocide. [Markus Schreiber/AP](#)

Accompanied by Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, Merkel began by seeing a crematorium and walking under the gate with the notorious words "Arbeit Macht Frei." That was a cynical phrase that meant "work will set you free," when the truth was that



inmates were subjected to immediate execution, painful scientific experiments, or forced labor.

Merkel and Morawiecki went next to the site of executions, where they bowed their heads before two wreaths bearing their nations' colors. The stay lasting several hours also included a visit to the conservation laboratory, where old leather shoes were laid out on a table, and a laying of candles at Birkenau, the part of the vast complex where Jews were subjected to mass murder in gas chambers.



Merkel, second left, under the entrance to Auschwitz, with its infamous sign reading "work makes you free." [Markus Schreiber/AP](#)

The donation to the Auschwitz Foundation comes in addition to 60 million euros that Germany donated when the fund was launched a decade ago, according to the Auschwitz-Birkenau state museum.

That brings the total German donation to 120 million euros and makes Germany by far the most generous of 38 countries that have contributed. As with the earlier donation, half comes from the federal government and half from the German states, an acknowledgement of the German nation's responsibility.

Since becoming chancellor in 2005, Merkel has paid her respects at other Nazi concentration camps, and she has been five times to Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust museum and memorial.



Merkel brought a donation of 60 million euros to help with the museum's conservation efforts. [Markus Schreiber/AP](#)

Still, Poland's Foreign Ministry called her visit "historic," in an obvious acknowledgement of the unique status Auschwitz has in the world's collective memory. The ministry also noted that it was just the third visit of an incumbent head of a German government.

Nazi German forces killed an estimated 1.1 million people at the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex during their occupation of Poland during World War II. Most of the victims were Jews transported from across Europe to be killed in gas chambers. But tens of thousands of others were killed there too, including Poles, Soviet prisoners of war, and Roma, or Gypsies. The camp was liberated by the Soviet army on January 27, 1945.

- **Read more:**
- [Angela Merkel condemned Trump's racist tweet about 4 congresswomen, saying it 'thwarts America's strength' as a diverse country](#)
- [The International Skating Union is really sorry for including an Auschwitz-themed outfit in their 'best costume' list](#)

- Auschwitz is urging people to stop posting photos of themselves posing on railway tracks that carried Holocaust victims to their deaths
- The true story of John Demjanjuk, twice convicted of being a guard at a Nazi death camp and now the subject of Netflix's 'The Devil Next Door'

*Read the original article on Associated Press. Copyright 2019. Follow Associated Press on Twitter.*

NEWSLETTER