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German President receives Holocaust survivor and Volkswagen apprentices at Schloss Bellevue

- Head of state thanks apprentices for their commitment to the preservation of Auschwitz Concentration Camp Memorial Site
- International Auschwitz Committee presents "B" statuette to Frank-Walter Steinmeier in Berlin
- Auschwitz survivor Leon Schwarzbaum honors Steinmeier's commitment to democracy and human dignity

Wolfsburg/Berlin – At the invitation of the International Auschwitz Committee (IAC), four apprentices from Volkswagen yesterday accompanied Leon Schwarzbaum, a Jewish survivor of Auschwitz extermination camp, to a reception given by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier. The 98-year-old from Berlin honored the German head of state with the "B" statuette. With this statuette, Auschwitz survivors and the IAC honor women and men who stand up for democracy, tolerance and human dignity and keep remembrance of Auschwitz alive. Last year, the budding Volkswagen specialists had helped to maintain and preserve the Memorial Site at Auschwitz Concentration Camp.



German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (fourth from left) receives the "B" statuette from the International Auschwitz Committee at Schloss Bellevue .



The sculpture was crafted by apprentices at the Hanover plant. The upside-down "B" is a reminder of the inscription "Arbeit macht frei" (work will set you free) above the entrance gate at Auschwitz.

In his acceptance speech, Frank-Walter Steinmeier said: "We need remembrance in order to shape a peaceful future. This is why I would especially like to thank the many apprentices from Volkswagen who have dedicated themselves to the preservation of Auschwitz Memorial Site and who have made this "B" statuette. I would also like to thank the international Auschwitz Committee for its commitment to keeping remembrance alive over the decades."

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In his congratulatory address, Leon Schwarzbaum emphasized: "I am very thankful for the fact that you are our President in these times. Democracy, diversity, tolerance and remembrance are the virtues of a republic where I would like to feel at home. With your clear words and the clear-cut personality you have shown in many political functions, you have been an opponent of anti-Semitism and a defender of human dignity for many years."

In a message of greetings read by IAC Vice-President Christoph Heubner, Holocaust survivor and author Zofia Posmysz from Poland, said: "Your deep personal opposition to anti-Semitism and your support for human rights have continued throughout your life together with your highly personal interest in friendly coexistence between Germany and Poland. In this world, many things have become more difficult. Familiar, toxic notes are being sounded in many languages. But, together with you, we will not give up hope."

The Presidents' guests were apprentices Josefina Degen (21, specialist in office management) and Eloisa Marzell (23, industrial clerk), both from Wolfsburg, Evdokia Siori (19, warehouse logistics operator) from Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles in Hanover, and Denis Wieckowski (22, electronics technician for automation) from the Brunswick plant.

Statements by apprentices:

Josefine Degen (21), specialist in office management, Wolfsburg: "It was a great honor for me to attend the presentation of the "B" on behalf of many apprentices. I would like to thank Volkswagen for the unique opportunity to talk to Holocaust survivor Leon Schwarzbaum and President Frank-Walter Steinmeier in person."

Eloisa Marzell (23), industrial clerk, Wolfsburg: "I am still very impressed by our President, his openness and his considerable interest in our memorial site work. At Auschwitz, I became more aware of how good my life is and how pleasant it is to live in a free country."

Evdokia Siori (19), warehouse logistics operator, Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles in Hanover: "At the Concentration Camp Memorial Site, I removed rust from enamel crockery and cleaned victims' shoes. This work showed me that the most important thing is for people to always be at peace with each other. No one must be discriminated against because of their religion, their origin or the color of their skin. Nothing like this must ever happen again."

Denis Wieckowski (22), electronics technician for automation, Brunswick: "At Schloss Bellevue, we discussed how we can keep alive our memory of the victims of National Socialism when survivors like Zofia Posmysz and Leon Schwarzbaum are no longer able to speak for themselves. I will remember my meeting with the President all my life."



"B" statuette

The sculpture was inspired by the letter "B" in the cynical inscription "Arbeit macht frei" (work will set you free) above the main gate of the former Auschwitz Concentration Camp. During the welding of the inscription, camp inmates had, secretly and unnoticed by the guards, turned the letter "B" upside-down as a mute sign of their resilience and their courage towards the SS. The first draft of the "B" statuette was produced by Lutz Brandt and the sculpture was designed by Michèle Déodat. The 12-centimetre-high statuette was hand-crafted by apprentices of Volkswagen Commercial Vehicles in Hanover.

The figures from politics, business and society who have been honored by the award of the statuette included Pope Francis, Prince Charles, the heir to the British throne, Ban Ki-moon, former UN Secretary General, Shimon Peres, the late former President of Israel, and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, as well as Sigmar Gabriel, former Vice-Chancellor and Chairman of the SPD.

Note for editors:

A [report](#) on Memorial site work at Auschwitz with interviews, photos and films as well as other photos and this text are available at www.volkswagen-newsroom.com for downloading.

In the case of the group photo, please give as the source "photo: Bernd Oertwig/IAC".

About the Volkswagen brand:

The Volkswagen Passenger Cars brand is present in more than 150 markets throughout the world and produces vehicles at over 50 locations in 14 countries. In 2018, Volkswagen delivered 6.24 million vehicles, including bestselling models such as the Golf, Tiguan, Jetta or Passat. Currently, 198,000 people work for Volkswagen across the globe. The brand also has over 7,700 dealerships with 74,000 employees.

Volkswagen is forging ahead consistently with the further development of automobile production.

E-mobility, smart mobility and the digital transformation of the brand are the key strategic topics for the future.
