

Cottbus Declaration on GDR Forced Labor of September 13, 2020: “Serious injustice has been done to these people”

The **Union of Victims’ Associations of Communist Tyranny** e.V. (UOKG), the **Human Rights Center Cottbus** (MRZ), the **International Society for Human Rights** (IGFM) and the **Memorial Foundation Victims of Communism** (VIC) organized a **tribunal on “Forced Labor in Political Prison in the GDR”**. The top-class international jury listened to expert lectures for two days and interviewed 14 witnesses. In the end the jury wrote the “**Cottbus Declaration on GDR Forced Labor**”.

Thomas Schirmmacher, President of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights, summarized his experience to the press:

“Almost all applications for recognition of post-traumatic disorders resulting from forced labor have been and are still being rejected, and many former political prisoners of the GDR are in despair. The slowness, even lameness, with which the authorities handle these applications is frightening, even contemptuous of humanity. The most important passage in this statement is therefore, in my opinion, the demand for a reversal of the burden of proof in the case of illnesses resulting from forced labor and typical of prison.”



Dieter Dombrowski, Federal Chairman of the Union of Victims’ Associations of Communist Tyranny (UOKG), welcomed the Cottbus’ Declaration with the words:

“It is important that in the 30th year of German Unity the exploitation of political prisoners through forced labor is not forgotten. Many of the former forced laborers have retained severe physical and psychological damage. The jury was unanimous in its advice and its demands. These people have suffered grave injustice and they need help and support.”

Dr. Susanne Kill, since 1999 head of the “Corporate History / Historical Collection” at DB AG (the German railway) and author of the book “Die Reichsbahn und der Strafvollzug in der DDR” spoke about “Prisoner Forced Labor for the German Reichsbahn of the GDR – Historical Research and Remembrance Policy”.

Further lectures on “Forced Labor of Political Prisoners in the SED Dictatorship” were given by Dr. Jan Philipp Wölbern, University of Postdam and specialist for the prisoner release between GDR and FRG, and Dr. Christian Sachse. Further contributions were made by Maria Nooke, Brandenburg’s representative for coming to terms with the consequences of the communist dictatorship, and Birgit Neumann-



During a plenary session © Martin Warnecke

Becker, Saxony-Anhalt’s representative for coming to terms with the SED dictatorship. Birgit Neumann-Becker also presented the touring exhibition of the state of Saxony-Anhalt, which had been set up in Cottbus and can be ordered.

The jury was made up of:

- Dr. Matthias Bath, former public prosecutor in Berlin 1988–2017, former political prisoner
- Peter Heidt, MdB, Chairman of the FDP parliamentary group in the Committee for Human Rights and Humanitarian Aid in the German Federal Parliament
- Prof. Dr. Huige Li, Deputy Director of the Institute for Pharmacology at the University Medical Center Mainz, born in China
- Bada Nam, Secretary General of the human rights organization PSCORE, South Korea
- Vladimir Novitsky, attorney from Moscow, Chairman of the International Society for Human Rights (IGFM), Russia Section
- Carla Ottmann, deputy federal chairwoman of the UOKG, former political prisoners in Hoheneck, honorary judge at the Social Court of Berlin
- Dr. Klára Pinerová, historian, Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes of the Czech Republic, in Prague
- Prof. Dr. Dr. Thomas Schirmmacher, President of the International Council of the International Society for Human Rights, expert on human trafficking
- Marion Smith, CEO of Victims of Communism, Memorial Foundation, US Congress
- Arnold Vaatz, MdB, since 2002 Deputy Chairman of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group in the German Federal Parliament, former GDR civil rights activist, lead the re-establishment of the Free State of Saxony

View this post online with further photos ...