

# Mission Statement 19/03/2016

## Reconciliation across the graves – Working for peace

The Volksbund Deutsche Kriegsgräberfürsorge e. V. was created out of society in 1919 in the face of millions of fallen soldiers in the First World War. Today it is supported by a wide non-partisan commitment.

Based on its statutes, the Volksbund has formulated this mission statement because of its firm determination to keep the memory of war and tyranny alive, foster understanding, reconciliation and peace among people and nations and stand for freedom and democracy.

### PRINCIPLES

Caring for war graves includes maintaining the graves of all victims of war and tyranny, both soldiers and civilians, public remembrance and commemorations as well as work with the youth, schools and education which aims at creating the ability for peace and willingness for understanding.

It is conducted on the basis of international humanitarian law and from the perspective of the values anchored in the constitution and the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. War grave care always occurs in an international context.

We face German history: The First World War, with all its consequences, was the beginning of an era of excessive force and totalitarian dictatorship. The Second World War was a war of German aggression under the National Socialists, who tried to bring a racially dominated Europe under German control.

This war, in particular in the East of Europe, was fought as a war of conquest and extermination. This created the circumstances for unprecedented war-crimes which culminated in the genocidal campaign against the European Jews.

Here, the question of personal responsibility under the conditions of dictatorship and war arises. Most fought thinking they were fulfilling their national duty. Many brought guilt upon themselves. Others could escape. Few resisted. Therefore, blanket culpability is impossible.

We mourn the dead in their millions, soldiers and civilians alike, whose great and prolonged suffering was in vain.

## **Tasks**

### ***War graves***

- Victims of war have a right to a permanent resting place based on international law.
- On the government's instruction, we maintain, construct and care for the German war gravesites abroad. We support the sponsors of war gravesites at home and are prepared to assume additional tasks here.
- We look for the German victims of war who have not yet been recovered, give them a decent burial and try to give them their names back. We inform and support their relatives.
- We develop the war gravesites at home and abroad as places of public commemoration, remembrance, encounters and learning.

### ***Remembrance and Commemoration***

- We create public memorials to the victims of war and tyranny. In addition, we support the dignified memory of all those who lost their lives working in the service of the Federal Republic of Germany abroad.
- We celebrate National Remembrance Day as a memorial day for all the victims of war and tyranny and continue to develop its form and content. On this day we express our responsibility for peace in justice and freedom.
- We look for ways to share memories in dialogue. Thus we want to learn about and understand the different historical experiences and cultures of remembrance, find the things we have in common and respect the differences.
- At the war graves, we especially promote the understanding between people from former enemy countries. Here we have experienced reconciliation for some time now. In future we will also see our international work as a contribution to peace and integration in Europe.

### ***Youth and Education***

- We support exchanges and historic-political education at war gravesites. In our work camps, encounter and education sites as well as diverse projects at home and abroad we encourage people to spend time with history and current events. Here the schools and sponsors of political education are important partners.
- In our educational work we teach the values of human rights, democracy and peace and deal with extremism, nationalism, racism and indiscriminate violence.
- We contribute to helping young people create remembrance and commemoration independently. This is a prerequisite for the care of war graves in the future.

## **ORGANISATION**

The Volksbund performs its work on federal and state level. Due to our federal structure we find partners nationwide and are available to people on the ground.

We depend on the support and voluntary commitment of all people and age groups. We promote participation and responsibility in the organisation, in particular, in the cooperation among voluntary and employed workers.

We cooperate nationwide and internationally with other actors and facilities of the culture of remembrance and commemoration, with the Bundeswehr, reservists and associations that keep traditions alive, with education carriers, churches and religious communities, with parties, clubs and trade unions, with state and community offices.

“However, those who close their eyes to the past will become blind to the present. Those who don’t want to remember inhumanity will become susceptible to new risks of contagion. [...] Exactly for this reason we must understand that there cannot be reconciliation without remembering.”

(Richard von Weizsäcker, Memorial event in the plenary hall of the German Bundestag on the 40th Anniversary of the end of the Second World War in Europe, 8 May 1985)