

**Özlem Genç May 29, 2023, Commemorative event, 30 years of arson attack, Solingen theater and concert hall**

Dear Mr. Federal President,  
Dear Madam President of the Bundestag,  
Dear Prime Minister,  
Dear Lord Mayor,  
Dear ministers,  
Dear Deputy Foreign Minister of the Turkish Republic,  
Dear Mr. Ambassador,  
Dear representatives of politics and society,  
Sevgili Durmuş Dedem,  
Dear family,

I was born into the Genç family in Solingen in 1999. Ever since I could think and feel, I noticed it. We never talked about it. But it was always there. Unspoken. Intangible. Like a dark cloud that hovered over our heads, some kind of dark secret - that oppressed us, cramped our hearts. Like an invisible, misunderstood, dull feeling that couldn't be put into words.

Later, as I grew older, I began to feel closer to this feeling. Literally. In my early childhood, I was later told, I ran my hands over the burn marks on my father's arms, feeling my way, wondering "What had happened?" I asked. But I received no answer. Just silence. Silence must be the language of those in pain. This speechlessness and the silent looks said something, but I didn't understand it. I tried to go deeper, but I couldn't feel it out. Over time, one snippet after another was added, and when I tried to put all the pieces together, I began to suspect that something terrible must have happened. In the end everything came together to form a gruesome picture of horror: the burns on my father Bekir's arms were the traces of severe burns from an arson attack, which, as the courts later described it, was one of "the most serious xenophobic crimes in post-war history", in which 5 more of our dearest family members also fell victim to the fire.

For most people it is the arson attack of Solingen. Abstractly thought of in its historical, political and social significance: the arson attack in Solingen on May 29, 1993. For us it is our family history and the loved ones we had to say goodbye to (or whom we were never allowed to get to know). And it is the stories of these loves that remain. Stories of people who had dreams. Of people. People who loved life, loved and were loved.

From my aunt Hatice, the adorable young woman who captivated everyone with her lively, cheerful nature. Hatice Halam, who dreamed of becoming a bank clerk one day and studied diligently at vocational college to achieve this. About my sweet cousin Saime, who couldn't wait to start kindergarten soon and told everyone with enthusiasm and anticipation that she would be starting school soon after kindergarten. From Gülistan Teyzem, who came to visit her cousins on an “overnight adventure” and didn’t know that she would never come back from this adventure. From Gürsün Halam, the new mother who was experiencing the spring of her life with her little 2-year-old daughter at the time. At the time, our entire family was in a state of joyful anticipation. In a kind of pre-bayram mood. There were only two days left until the Kurban Bayramı, the festival of sacrifice - Grandma had already bought the little ones new clothes. And the enchanting Hülya couldn't wait to put on her new party dress, which grandma had bought especially for this beautiful event and saved for the holiday.

And then it happened. That night: these 5 innocent people were taken from life. It never happened that Hülya wore her party dress, that Saime went to school, that Hatice began her training... People were torn from life. And a hole was torn in the hearts of those who remained. It would later be described with the apt words: “Even in the survivors, something died.” And even if all that wasn't terrible enough, the attack tore a deep, insurmountable trench in a newly reunified country. The cracks left their mark, and the brutality of this attack left the country in a state of shock. The fire that burned the house and the people living in it spread like wildfire throughout society. A blazing fire of anger and rage that flared up in hearts and found expression in spontaneous funeral marches on the streets of the republic. Because the people who were the targets of such attacks no longer wanted to remain silent or watch.

What began years ago, a wave of racially motivated violence, reached its tragic climax here. A pogrom atmosphere that began with the attacks in Hoyerswerda, Mölln and Rostock-Lichtenhagen spread across our country like dark storm clouds.

And our family's burned house was there.

Symbolic of a society in ruins.

Remembering a time that we thought was already behind us.

And there she came: She rose from the rubble and grief, her vulnerable heart burdened with pain, drying her tears, all around her the grieving and angry people who were waiting for a small sign from her, about their horror, their speechlessness to express her anger in a powerful way, and there she stood, all eyes on her, rose and spoke her word. She, the unshakable one. Brave one. Graceful. Heroine. Mevlüde Annem. She spoke her word. Just one word - and the conflagration, an already foreseeable, uncontrolled wave of hatred and violence, came to a standstill like a miracle.

Commemorating 30 years also means commemorating her triumph. The triumph of good against evil. The victory of Mevlüde Annem, love personified, against hate.

Mevlüde Annem, I can't find words to describe you, and I can't express how victorious you have been and still are today.

They burned down her home, which she had built together with Durmuş Dede with the diligent work of her hands and under whose roof she united the family. They wanted her to no longer feel like she belonged, to leave the country and for her family to disperse. But she decided to stay here with my grandfather Durmuş. She had an even more beautiful house rebuilt, stone by stone, under which she reunited the family. They wanted her to become alienated from Germany and leave the country. But she stayed and consciously applied for German citizenship. She coined the plural of home early on, at a time when this category of thought did not even exist in theory, by saying: "Germany is my home, and Turkey is my home."

They wanted her to hate the world for what was done to her and her loved ones. But she didn't allow herself to be led into this hatred of other people and these generalizations. She always pointed to her hand and explained, "Just as the fingers of one hand are not the same, so people in a society are not the same."

They wanted to provoke civil war and a counter-reaction so that the cycle of violence would continue indefinitely. But she brought people together with her reconciliation and love. They wanted destruction and death, but she wanted life. "Love makes people live, but hate brings death," she said. She has breathed life back into life: into survivors and into the living.

They wanted to sow fear and anxiety, but she, she sowed courage and hope in people's hearts. They wanted people to lose faith in humanity. But she never lost her faith. With the power of faith - with her Imaan - she has moved mountains. Yes, faith can move mountains.

And she: She is more. She is faith. And she is the mountain. She has also triumphed against hatred in full. She proved that love is stronger than hate. That special person. THE HUMAN Mevlüde Genç, Mevlüde Annem, Bilgi Anne, the wise mother - what an honor that she lived and worked among us humans.

Today her role model is more important than ever: then as now it was said 'Never again!', but unfortunately it happened again. And after every 'Never again!', it happened again and again. And I fear that today we will say 'Never again!' again and that it will happen again.

Among those present today are relatives from Hanau, the arson attack in Mölln and the many relatives of the victims of the NSU and others. Their tears and sadness remind us every day that the fight against hatred is not over.

And there are these spiritual arsonists today too: It starts with words and words become actions. The posters after the arson attack read "Incendiary speeches become incendiary devices." But: How many more incendiary speeches were given afterwards?

We must be careful about WHAT we say and HOW we say it. Especially when we are in public and seen as a role model by others. In times when the boundaries of what can be said have shifted and hatred floods the internet and takes root in people's hearts, it is not only important to pay attention to what you say, but that you say anything at all. We must ask ourselves whether the problem is not the loud minority that spreads the wrong things, but rather the silent majority that is unable to say the right thing. If my grandmother, then she, the hurting mother and grandmother, could get those words out of her mouth at what was probably the most painful moment of her life, then how much sooner should we all finally muster the courage to say something.

And it is important to speak for those who cannot speak: the persecuted, the displaced, the forgotten. My grandma is often quoted as saying, "Let's be friends!" I understand her appeal to be friends with all human friends and with all those who have no friends. With those who have no lobby, with those from whom you gain nothing if you defend them, and perhaps even have disadvantages if you defend them. If you say the right thing, you shouldn't care what the world thinks. But if you win an election by targeting the weakest and most vulnerable in our society, then it may seem like you have won, but in reality you have lost.

We can learn a lot more from Mevlüde Anne. Especially about her steadfastness. She has received a lot of recognition for this, but she has not only reaped laurels in the course of her work. How often unfounded rumors were spread behind our backs, and how often she had to listen to criticism. As I was writing this speech, I remembered a particular scene. At last year's commemoration, she was interrupted by a shouter during a short speech. But I will never forget her reaction: she was undeterred and - as if he had not spoken at all - she insisted on her words and ended her speech like a rock in the surf, showing people the way into the future and cannot be shaken. Because even 30 years ago she didn't allow herself to be dictated to how she should act and what she should say. She did not bow to the dictates of hatred. In exactly the same way, we as society and politicians must not allow our agenda to be dictated to us. We must not jump into discourses and imitate the language of people who want to drag us all into the abyss. It helps us to learn from history: In order to appease the heated masses, 30 years ago, just a few days before the attack, the Basic Law was changed - the unchangeable, most sacred document of our democracy. But even this step has not calmed any minds. On the contrary, even though love has risen in this country, hate has never really stopped through such measures of appeasement.

At the end of this speech, as a young member of my family, I would particularly like to call for everyone to do everything in their power to ensure that the commemoration and remembrance of the arson attack does not come to a standstill. We must not stop or grow tired of remembering and commemorating. To my horror, I have often had to learn the hard way that the younger generation is completely unaware of the arson attack in Solingen and the stories of the victims. A look at the school textbooks reveals the reason: despite its recent nature, the attack is not discussed. So let us all work together. Let us bring remembrance and admonition into school textbooks. Let's name schools after Mevlüde Genc, streets, libraries, public spaces, halls. May humanity follow her example. Let us immortalize the names of the deceased everywhere so that the memory of these people never fades and their stories continue to be told. The question arose in the family, "What is missing to remember and commemorate now after 30 years?"

In response, a heartfelt wish arose that I would like to express at this point on behalf of the family: On Untere Werner Strasse, where the house stood back then and now chestnut trees reach into the sky, we as a family would like to have a house of remembrance, a central memorial in the form of a museum in which the events and consequences would be documented and made accessible to visitors from all over the world. Where the house stood at the time and where the terrible crime occurred, a memorial is to be built that will keep the memory of the past alive and also make Mevlüde Anne's commitment to conciliatory and peaceful coexistence known to visitors. We hope

this wish comes true and are happy to contribute our time and energy to the success of such a project.

At this point, a special thank you goes to everyone who has contributed and is contributing to keeping this memory alive. Government representatives from the German and Turkish governments, friends of our family, the city of Solingen and many more. And a very special thank you goes to all the silent heroes who actively shaped this year's memory with their ideas and projects. Let us all continue on this path together. With love and for all people.

I cannot end this speech without remembering my loved ones who have passed away. May Allah, the Merciful, embrace them with His infinite mercy and love. Allah Rahmet Eylesin.

Hülya Genç

Saime Genç

Hatice Genç

Gürsün İnce

Gülüstan Öztürk

Mevlûde Genç