

## Speech by Mayor Peter Weiken at the introduction of Hugo Stern as the namesake of the private Sekundarschule

Ladies and gentlemen,

In my capacity as mayor of the city of Rütthen, I too, would like to welcome you here today, and also to extend special greetings and a warm welcome to the members of the Stern family who are present on this occasion. It is an honour for us that you made the long journey to Rütthen and we wish you a pleasant stay in our little town.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2000, on the occasion of our city's 800th birthday, a new book of over 1000 pages on the history of our town was published. Of particular importance in this many-faceted work was the extensive treatise by Dr. Hans Günter Bracht on the time of the Nazi dictatorship in Rütthen and, above all, the effects of the criminal persecution of the Jews in our town.

For the first time, the local population had the opportunity to experience a deep and cohesive insight into this dark chapter of local history through the well-founded research and the facts-based, objective and at the same time vivid presentation of the author.

Above all, after decades of silence, which was rarely and only selectively broken, this treatise represented a breakthrough on the topic of the local conditions of the Nazi era and their disastrous consequences for the Jewish community in Rütthen.

At the same time, this authentic contribution to the book on the local persecution of Jews during the Nazi era was significant in bringing about a new beginning, in that it decisively ensured the emergence and development of a deliberate and committed local culture of remembrance of Jewish life in Rütthen. Only if you are prepared to face the past openly and honestly can you make the present and the future better. In 2005, the Rütthen town council unanimously decided on the scientific research and analysis of the Jewish burial place in the town moat by the Hachtor, one of the old town gates. This cemetery is, at over 400 years of existence, considered to be the oldest in Westphalia. At the same time, it represents the largest and most important documentation site of Jewish life in Rütthen:

Since then, the results of the research that have been completed and published have provided diverse and clear insights into the burial culture, denominational ethics and the social development of the Jewish community in Rütthen, as the tombstones whose inscriptions and symbols were thus made accessible, have a unique and lasting historical value as stone documents of the former Jewish community in Rütthen. They are accessible to everyone worldwide via the website of the town of Rütthen and are available to our local schools in digital form for teaching purposes. Here you can also find the burial sites of Dr. Hugo Stern and his ancestors from Rütthen.

An initiative of citizens of Rūthen introduced another important phase of this local culture of remembrance in the years 2013 - 2016, namely the placing of so-called "stumbling blocks" on the sidewalks in front of the homes of those Jewish people from Rūthen who were murdered in the Shoah during the Nazi era. These brass 'stumbling blocks' give details of the victims of the Nazi terror who lived in these houses. Incidentally, it was an unknown student of this school who gave a simple and yet very profound answer to the question about the meaning and significance of these stumbling block campaigns, which were also carried out throughout Europe: "With these memorial stones," he said spontaneously, "one stumbles with the mind and falls with the heart".

In a figurative sense, with the naming of this school of secondary education after one of the Jewish citizens of Rūthen, Hugo Stern, the town of Rūthen has been given yet another 'stumbling block' on the ongoing path of our local culture of remembrance, one that is undoubtedly striking and enduring in its symbolic power, as this school name also appeals to our minds and touch our hearts..

Without a doubt it commemorates the numerous Jewish people from Rūthen who - like Hugo Stern and his family - were expelled from their homeland in 1938/39 by the Nazis' inhuman racial policies. Above all, however, the name reminds us that it was heart and mind that prompted Hugo Stern to return to Germany soon after the end of the war and the horrors of the Nazi dictatorship and despite all the injustice, humiliation and persecution he had suffered in the country of his birth.

Indeed, it was with mind and heart, with magnanimity and a personal desire for reconciliation, that Hugo Stern wanted to participate, committedly and responsibly, in the construction of a new, free and democratic constitutional state on the soil of his old homeland.

In this respect, Hugo Stern was a Jewish humanist and at the same time an enlightened German patriot. The life and work of the man whose name this school would come to bear in the distant future represent a lasting appeal and lasting motivation for all of us, whether we are personally connected with the school, or not.

From this day on, it is his name that urges us all to use our hearts and minds, consciously and with empathy, against all forms of discrimination, racism and, above all, against the hateful anti-Semitism, which unfortunately was neither limited to the historical time nor the country, but is again, in the 21st century, rearing its terrifying head. The name 'Hugo Stern' urges us always and everywhere, courageously and actively, to stand up for freedom, justice, tolerance and human dignity, because these values were to Hugo Stern - and at the same time remain for all of us - fundamental to a humane, democratic society.

In this sense, let me close with a Hebrew-German wish for today's naming:

*"Jehi bejt ha-sefer ha-se jad va-shem le – Hugo Stern sichrono liwracha"*

"May this school be a monument and name for the memory of Hugo Stern!"

- which in a free German translation means: „Möge diese Schule ein Denkmal und Name für die Erinnerung an Hugo Stern sein!“

Thank you very much