

**Thuringia, the 07.06.2023**

**A camp is not a home, a camp is not a safe place!**

**Statement on the fire in the refugee shelter in Apolda on Sunday, 4.6.2023  
and the subsequent evacuation and accommodation of those affected.**

**Networking in solidarity with those affected by the deadly fire in Apolda  
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On Sunday morning (4.6.23), a fatal fire broke out in a shelter for refugees in Apolda. An eight-year-old child has died and there are several injured. Our grief is with the child's family and all relatives, to whom we extend our deepest condolences. We are shocked and stand in full solidarity with the residents of Apolda.

The causes of the fire in Apolda have not yet been fully clarified. But the horrific consequences of the fire are not only a work of the flames, but also the result of a state and a society that criminalises migration, robs people of their autonomy and forces them to live in cramped spaces and poor conditions in camps!

### **Camps are not a safe place for anyone!**

The camps in which refugees are accommodated in Germany are often in need of renovation. Their construction is not designed for hundreds of people to live there for years. This becomes particularly clear in emergency situations: the corridors and staircases are often too narrow for quick evacuation. Crowding and dangerous situations occur.

In emergency situations, especially for families with young children, the danger of not being able to get out of the house fast enough is particularly great.

At the same time, people in collective camps are exposed to particular danger: The camps provide a target for fascist violence and endanger the safety and lives of those affected. Last year alone, there were a dozen fires in refugee shelters in Germany. In addition to Saxony, arson attacks have also happened in Baden-Württemberg, Hesse and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. In the Pankow district of Berlin, a Syrian mother died after an arson attack in January this year.

In 2022, there were a total of 121 assaults, attacks, property damages and physical assaults on accommodation for refugees. Compared to the previous year, this was an increase of 73%. Since 2015, there have been 1,000 such attacks, of which 120 were arson attacks (information from Ezra - counselling centre for those affected by right-wing, racist and anti-Semitic violence in Thuringia). The racist propaganda by the AfD, parts of the CDU and the German media is further fuelling the inflammatory, hateful atmosphere, that prevails in many areas of Germany.

At the end of last year, on 11 October 2022, there was also an attempted attack on a camp for refugees in Apolda. Two days before, two detonable explosive devices were found nearby at the Straußfurt railway station, one of them wrapped in a swastika flag.

But what consequences were drawn from this obvious dangerous situation for the refugees in Apolda and Thuringia?

After the fire in Apolda on Sunday morning, a dark picture emerges: Although the first forces of the volunteer fire brigade were on the scene nine minutes after receiving the emergency call at 4.57 a.m., several residents independently reported that there had already been a fire in the accommodation at 4.40 a.m. and that they had to wait almost half an hour for the fire brigade.

According to our information, this delay can be explained by the fact that the accommodation in Apolda was not directly connected to the fire brigade's central reporting point in Apolda. Emergency calls from residents or the security service were needed before the large-scale operation could be triggered. The resulting delay could have been prevented.

Numerous questions remain, for which the right addressees must be found: Why was there presumably no central fire alarm connected to the alarm centre, but only smoke detectors in the residential units that registered the development of smoke too late, when the smoke had crept out of the central building into the residential areas already?

When was the last fire training with the residents of the accommodation in Apolda?

What additional protective measures were taken in the accommodation in Apolda and Thuringia after the attempted attack last year?

Can causes of fire resulting from inadequate sanitation or poor condition of kitchen appliances such as cookers etc. be ruled out?

All this came and comes too late for the 8-year-old who lost his life in the fire.

What else has to happen so that the lives of people seeking protection in Germany are finally and truly protected?

Did a child really have to die before we start talking about the safety of refugees? How many people have to die before we finally put an end to camp accommodation?

**The evacuation to a converted factory building in Hermsdorf was an additional burden for those affected and - despite the commitment of many rescue workers, pastors and other helpers - was marked by the bureaucracy of a racist camp system.**

When the Minister of Migration, Doreen Denstädt, talks about the evacuation of the people from Apolda as a "smooth and not additionally stressful process", this can only be interpreted as mockery or ignorance of the perception of the people affected. Before publishing such a statement in a press release, a migration minister should not only have spoken with officials, but also with the migrants themselves.

The affected family and about 20 other people have been accommodated in Apolda. The family is being cared for there and can receive visitors.

Most of the people affected by the fire, on the other hand, were taken to Hermsdorf to a converted factory building.

As confirmed by officials, the first buses to evacuate those affected left Apolda more than seven hours after the fire (12.30 p.m.). During this time, the people who had just escaped from a burning house were sitting in the blazing sun on a sports field opposite the camp. According to a statement by the district administrator to the mdr, there were probably also shady places.

People came with only the clothes they wore on their bodies. Some people wore only underwear except for rescue blankets that were distributed at some point. There was deep sadness and horror.

Contrary to official accounts, many of those affected told us that they did not receive any food during this time except for some water and an apple.

During the entire waiting time and until they arrived in Hermsdorf, many people did not know where they would be taken. When they asked, they were not answered specifically. Above all, they had expected a safe place where they could finally rest and recover from the shock.

One person did not want to take the buses to the unknown destination because she had to go to work that day. When the person tried to leave she was detained and taken away by the police, who had surrounded the sports ground.

After the affected people arrived in Hermsdorf at the warehouse that had been converted into an initial reception centre, they insisted on registering all affected people before letting them into the building. The last registered people waited until after 6 p.m. on the asphalt forecourt of the warehouse to be let in.

According to consistent reports from those affected and an employee of the German Red Cross, there was no food until they had been admitted to the camp, so some of those affected - apart from an apple - remained without a meal for up to 13 hours after the fire.

Although the toxic smoke from the fire was still clinging to the clothes of many of the victims, they were not given a change of clothes by the Red Cross on Monday evening, despite previous promises. When self-organised helpers who had travelled to the location noticed this, they asked the Red Cross to give them back the clothing donations they had given to the Red Cross in advance so that they could distribute them on their own. This was refused on the grounds that the clothing donations could no longer be distinguished from the other clothes in the camp and that the helpers should not be given the wrong clothes.

Even on Monday afternoon, many people still reported to us that they had not received any clothes! This is denied by officials, but in fact many of the people are still wearing the same clothes we found them in on Sunday shortly after the evacuation.

A young woman from the camp in Hermsdorf told us on Monday afternoon that she still had not received any clothes and also reported - as many others also did - about the shocking unequal treatment of Ukrainians and other refugees:

“Since Yesterday we need clothes, just to take a shower, because we had the smell of smoke, because we were next to the fire, so since yesterday we say ‘we need new clothes - just a t-shirt, just a t-shirt and underwear’. And they said ‘okay, we will give you later’ - Okay so we waited and were patient. We waited until today morning, and finally then I said: ‘okay we need a t-shirt to take a shower’, we cannot wear that t-shirt anymore. And they said, ‘we don't have any clothes right now here’. And we said ‘okay’. And I was going back to my sleeping place. And then I saw that people - the Ukrainian people - in front of my eyes, they went to a room and they got clothes - they took new clothes and also shoes and all this. That was a shock and a surprise for me and I went to the woman that was giving out clothes in this room and I said: ‘you can't just separate people like that and say, yes you're beautiful. You are Ukrainian you can get that’ and other people you say you can't get that. The woman became really rude, directly she told me: ‘If you have a problem here, just go away.’ And I said: ‘Okay I will go - but I need clothes first’ and she said ‘I will force all of you out of here! I want just ukrainian people in this building!’ That was so rude, really I cried so much.”

The accommodation in Hermsdorf is a warehouse, there are no rooms, only arranged double bunk beds, which are separated from each other by construction fences and tarpaulins.

The hall is very loud, it is noisy. It also gets very hot during the day and there are no windows. One person housed there has a dog that now barks all night and prevents many from sleeping because of the construction.

For example, 6 people, included two families, sleep together in one single area. For some FLINTA\* persons, for example devout Muslims, it is hard to go to sleep in front of other men. One resident told us about a man with a disability who immediately pointed out to the staff that he could not sleep in the bunk beds provided because of injuries. This was not responded to in any way, so he made his own way back to Apolda in a wheelchair.

Most of the people who lived in the camp in Apolda have a residence status, many have jobs in Apolda, go to school there or do training. To make matters worse, those who did not take their own identity cards with them in the chaos of the fire are now not allowed to leave Hermsdorf until the foreigners authority has provided them with a new one.

Almost all the people we spoke to complain about the lack of any communication to them from the authorities, that they are left completely in the dark about their remaining in their current situation.

This description of the evacuation and our previous press release of Sunday night is not meant to question the efforts of the more than 150 firefighters, bus drivers, social workers and Red Cross staff who are trying to support those affected as well as possible. We are grateful to all the people who have been working unbureaucratically and with great energy to improve the situation of those affected since Sunday Morning!

**We share the grief and anger of those affected and fight for dignified living and freedom of movement for all.**

We demand a quick and consistent clarification of the causes of the fire and of the mistakes made during the evacuation in Apolda and concrete consequences!

We call on the Thuringian politicians and authorities to immediately provide decent provisions for the people in Apolda and Hermsdorf - in cash or in material goods according to their needs.

We demand immediate unrestricted access to the familiar living and working environment in Apolda! This requires a shuttle service until the return to Apolda and, above all, unbureaucratic permission!

We demand immediate accommodation in flats or hotels, especially for families and others in particular need of protection!

For the abolition of the camp system, humane living in Thuringia and freedom of movement for all!

We demand open borders, safe entry routes, residence, freedom of movement, participation and justice for all!

And: We will continue to fight together for these aims. We do not leave it at demands, but take things into our own hands, in radical solidarity with all people who suffer under the racist asylum system!

