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Panel Discussion: "And We Were Germans: The Life of Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi and Ralph Giordano"

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ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Helsinki process, formally titled the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. As of January 1, 1995, the Helsinki process was renamed the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The membership of the OSCE has expanded to 56 participating States, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia.

The OSCE Secretariat is in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of the participating States' permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations. Periodic consultations are held among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government.

Although the OSCE continues to engage in standard setting in the fields of military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns, the Organization is primarily focused on initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States. The Organization deploys numerous missions and field activities located in Southeastern and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia. The website of the OSCE is: <www.osce.org>.

ABOUT THE COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance by the participating States with their OSCE commitments, with a particular emphasis on human rights.

The Commission consists of nine members from the United States Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair rotate between the Senate and House every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

In fulfilling its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates relevant information to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports that reflect the views of Members of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing details about the activities of the Helsinki process and developments in OSCE participating States.

The Commission also contributes to the formulation and execution of U.S. policy regarding the OSCE, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from participating States. The website of the Commission is: <www.csce.gov>.

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Panel Discussion: "And We Were Germans: The Life of Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi and Ralph Giordano"

February 20, 2018

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Washington, DC

The briefing was held at 2:00 p.m. in Room 121, Canon House Office Building, Washington, DC, Dr. Mischa E. Thompson, Senior Policy Advisor, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding.

Panelists present: Dr. Mischa E. Thompson, Senior Policy Advisor, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe; and John A. Kantara, Director, "And We Were Germans: The Life of Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi and Ralph Giordano. "

Dr. THOMPSON. Good morning. My name is Dr. Mischa Thompson. Welcome to "And We Were Germans," a briefing hosted by the U.S. Helsinki Commission, also known as the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. This event is taking place in honor of Black History Month. For those of you who may not know, the Helsinki Commission is an independent U.S. Government agency focused on human rights, economics, and security in the 57 North American and European countries that make up the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, or OSCE. The commission is chaired by Members of Congress, bicameral, bipartisan, and includes the executive branch.

The OSCE has had a focus on diverse and vulnerable populations, from Roma and Jewish populations to national minorities and migrants in Europe and the United States, since its inception. Over the past decade, our commissioners have also focused on the situation of people of African descent in Europe, or black Europeans, from hearings in the U.S. Congress to resolutions in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. You can find a report in the blue folder that details many of these initiatives.

Now, central to those efforts has simply been raising awareness about Europe's long history and contributions of African-descent populations, from the Moors in Spain to present-day migrants and refugees. We are, therefore, very pleased to be screening today a film that is both American and European history, on two luminaries: Hans Massaquoi

and Ralph Giordano. We are also thankful that Dean Jacqueline Jones and DeWayne Wickham of Morgan State University in Maryland were able to facilitate the participation of the film's director, Professor John Kantara, in today's briefing. Professor Kantara, we're just really pleased that you're able to be here today.

Mr. KANTARA. Thank you. Thank you for having me.

Dr. THOMPSON. You can find Professor Kantara's bio in the blue folder and online. And he will also be here with us to discuss the film and what is currently happening overseas immediately following the film. And so, without further ado, we will present now "And We Were Germans."

[The film "And We Were Germans: The Life of Hans-Jürgen Massaquoi and Ralph Giordano" is shown.]

Dr. THOMPSON. So one of the things I meant to say in the beginning is this is not an easy film to watch. If anyone has been to any other commission briefing, I think we're known for actually playing films that address very difficult subjects, but with the goal of really bringing attention to events that are taking place, and this idea toward moving toward solution. So, with that, I want to turn to Professor Kantara and just begin by asking you: Why is that you even decided to make this film?

Mr. KANTARA. Well, basically, it was by coincidence. In 1997, I went with a group of black German youth to Chicago. And somehow the German cultural institution Goethe Institute got wind of it, that we were coming to Chicago, to Northwestern University, and trying to develop a black German African American cultural exchange program. And what happened is they invited us to come to the Goethe Institute and have a little reception. And Hans Massaquoi, a Chicagoan, came to that reception. And we had an older man, a black German with us. And these two older gentlemen then were talking to each other. And, I said, who's this?

And so I basically came and eavesdropped a little bit—journalist, you know. And I got to know that he was actually from Hamburg. And so I got to know Hans Massaquoi a little bit. And he told me that he was planning on his autobiography. And then I said, okay, if you write that autobiography, I'll make a film about that. So I was the first one—[laughs]—to ask him. And he said, okay, let's do it. And then I did. That's why I did the film, because he came out with his autobiography, "Destined to Witness" in—first published in German, and a few years later in English as well. And it was great. It's been a running success in Germany. And we got to convince a couple of editors that we must write that book with that access. And, with that book written, we must make a film. And so I did the documentary on it.

Dr. THOMPSON. Wow. So now can you tell us a little bit about how this film was actually received? This film was done in 1999, so there were a few things going on then. [Laughter.]

Mr. KANTARA. Right. I mean, having in mind that Germany was just reuniting, in a way, we had some real hard problems, with extreme right-wing activity, particularly in East Germany. And so we had refugee homes burning and it was really not a nice sight. So we really thought we needed to explain to our viewers that, my people and black Germans have a long history in Germany. Quite a few Germans do not know that up to 1918, the end of the First World War, Germany was a colonial power. So, Tanzania was a Ger-

man colony. Cameroon was a German colony. Rwanda, Burundi, German colonies. Namibia, a German colony, and in the Pacific as well.

We had actually a sizable community of black people living in Germany. Not only Germans moving to Namibia, it went the other way around as well. And, particularly in bigger cities like Hamburg, like Berlin, at the start of the Second World War we had a sizable community of black people living there. Not big. Not like in, my hosts at Morgan State University—my hosts in Morgan State University showed me Baltimore. Oh, no, not as big as in Baltimore. But, still, we were there.

And that is not really well known. That was not really known in Germany at all, because the colonies were given to France and to England after the war. And basically, the Nazis did everything to kill us off. And so there weren't that many remaining after the war. Massaquoi immigrated to the U.S. just like a few others, you know, just said: Get us out of here. And so, that history is not really taught in schools and people didn't know. And so I wanted to change that a little bit.

Dr. THOMPSON. Now you touched on a number of different things, in what you said just now. The film touched on everything from history, to personal experience, just even surviving.

Mr. KANTARA. Yes.

Dr. THOMPSON. But what touched you most about that film? I mean, you met luminaries during this film. There's just so much here. But what touched you the most, would you say?

Mr. KANTARA. Well, you see, we are students of the African American struggle and the civil rights movement, because we took a few cues from black people and their struggle in the United States and we said: What can we learn from that? I mean, we all listen to Martin Luther King, his famous speech at the Mall, you know, "I have a dream." We have that in school. But, you know, we actually took some cues and said: We have similar problems. What can we learn from African Americans? And so, we now have in February in Germany a Black History Month, of course, because of you guys having created this.

I wanted to inform my compatriots, the Germans, about our history, about the fact that we're here—that we're there, and we're here to stay. We're not leaving. This is our country. We're not foreigners. We're Germans. And that was important. And so trying to organize, trying to find a way to bring people together—not only black people, but, black and white people, and Jewish people, and the people who are affected by discrimination and racism, even today, that is a very important task.

And that's what I wanted to do, help people out—and myself, because I have two kids. I have two beautiful children—and hopefully they're watching—[laughter]—I have two beautiful children. And I want them to live in a safe Germany, as Germans. And so we learned a bit from the American experience. And I think we could actually bring it to bear and change a few things. We're still struggling, but we're going there.

Dr. THOMPSON. And I'll ask you just one more question before we turn it over to the audience. You had mentioned that you were at a preview of the "Black Panther" film.

Mr. KANTARA. Yes.

Dr. THOMPSON. And so, just because you're a black filmmaker—[laughter]—I'd be very interested to hear how that film was actually received in Germany.

Mr. KANTARA. You know, we have a few organizations in Berlin who actually came together to arrange a screening of the "Black Panther" movie the day it came out in Germany. So they actually—10 different organizations came together and hired a cinema complex. It was full. And it was amazing to see how young, black, German kids—you know, 16-year-olds—related to what was shown in the film. They were picking up on lines and hollering in the—[laughter]—and it was really funny to see. And I was sitting actually there in amazement, seeing how they identified.

I mean, mind you, one of America's biggest exports is their cultural export. It is Hollywood. We all see these Hollywood movies. But as Germans, we try to relate, but we're not really represented. I mean, you—I guess you know that, but the black guy always has to die first. [Laughs.] And so to us, it was really amazing to see a positive image of Africa being depicted, our beautiful people. I mean, it's a comic. It's entertainment. But there was a stronger message behind it. And obviously, at least where I'm coming from in Berlin, everybody loved it. And I think it's a huge success. You know, and we relate. We can relate to the people, the positive stories being told there. It was great fun.

Dr. THOMPSON. So now, with that, I'll actually open it up to the audience. We have time for a few questions. Is there anyone that would like to ask a question?

QUESTIONER. How available is the film to universities and——

Dr. THOMPSON. I'm sorry, I apologize. Can you please just say who you are and what organization you're with?

QUESTIONER. I'm Dr. Marilyn Sephocle from Howard University.

Mr. KANTARA. Well, it's always been a problem, because it actually belongs to ZDF Television. I have, as the author and the director, the right to show it. The problem is, you know, to give it to universities—I would love to do that, because it's just a resource you could use in your classrooms. But I'm not so sure whether that is possible without paying the——

QUESTIONER. Of course, we'd——

Mr. KANTARA. But you'd have to go to ZDF Television Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen, and I can help you with that a little bit. But it takes time. There's bureaucracy. [Laughter.]

Dr. THOMPSON. Are there other questions from the audience, or online? Can you say your name and your organization?

QUESTIONER. Rachel Mina from Congressman Tom O'Halleran's office.

You spoke earlier about how there were still many problems that Afro-Germans were experiencing. And would you compare those to some of the things that African Americans struggle with, that African Americans have here in the States? Or are they a different set because the culture is different? Or how would you compare them?

Mr. KANTARA. Well, obviously, Germany is not the U.S. But we have a few problems, I would say, which are the same. I'm sure you're familiar with the problem of racial profiling. That's something we experience as well—driving while black. That is something which is happening. I mean, quite a few people would dispute this and say, no, police are colorblind. Well, I like to—I'd like to differ, I think. There are some problems with policing, although it gets better because—at least in metropolitan areas like Berlin—we get more and more people of color in the force.

So that is really important. The force should look like the community it's serving. And that is not really the case as of yet. But it's changing. I know that police in Berlin are trying actively to recruit more from minorities. It is not always simple—it's not easy, because for so long there was a perceived, maybe even only, antagonism. And now what we're trying to do is, we have to overcome this perceived antagonism. We have got to have more diversity in the police force, but not only in the police force, in the armed services as well.

I think we're probably the whitest force—military force in Western Europe. The Dutch are more diverse. The French, the British. German armed forces, the Bundeswehr, is very white. And so we need to change that, because of the social mobility it provides. I mean, it's not only just, oh, we'd like to have more colorful armed forces, no, or police force. It means social mobility. There are some euros put in that. And we are taxpayers. We want to participate in that. So it needs participation.

Dr. THOMPSON. Are there other questions? So we'll go here and then we'll go here.

QUESTIONER. Hi. I'm Sibel with the minority office of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Mr. KANTARA. OK.

QUESTIONER. I have a question about how Hans Massaquoi arrived in the United States. Was he—what year did he arrive and was he granted asylum as a refugee or did he immigrate? How was that process?

Mr. KANTARA. Yes. Well, first of all, Hans Massaquoi did not go straight from Germany in 1948 to the U.S. He first went to Liberia, where his father came from. And he stayed a few years in Liberia, but his father died. And so he migrated to the U.S. from Liberia because his maternal uncle—so, from his white mother's side—was living in Chicago. So he got a visa to immigrate to the United States to see his family basically—his white family in Chicago. And as I understand it, he was drafted into the Korean War. So that must have been in the 1950s. So don't lay me down on the correct year. I would have to refer you to his book, "Destined to Witness," because I think it's in there.

But he was actually—he told me he became a paratrooper for the U.S. Air Force. And he was able to study, through the GI law. So he studied journalism after his service in the U.S. Army—or Air Force—what is it? I'm not sure, Army or Air Force. And then, his first job was at Jet magazine, something like this, yes? Somewhere in Chicago. And eventually he became managing editor of Ebony magazine after years and years and years and years. But he was thrown into chronically, basically, the civil rights movement as a journalist. And, it's an irony, you know? You just escape Nazi persecution in Germany, only to come to America and see that all is not right in America as well.

And so he had fire in him to report about it. And so some of the greatest men I ever met, Hans Massaquoi, and Ralph Giordano. They were good friends. And they were really inspirational. They were really—both passed, unfortunately. But, they were really inspirational. And particularly this friendship between this Jew and this black man, you know? They were—they were inseparable. They worked together, because they know the enemy—that our enemy is the same—they make—they make no distinction, basically. You know? So, whether it's antisemitism or racism, it's the same thing.

Dr. THOMPSON. So we have time for one more question or comment from the audience.

Mr. KANTARA. Sure.

QUESTIONER. Are you familiar with Kurt Vonnegut's short story, "Displaced Person"?

Mr. KANTARA. No, I'm not—I'm familiar with Kurt Vonnegut, but not that story.

QUESTIONER. But this is a story of an Afro-German boy who survives World War II and is isolated. And American soldiers come, and it's a black battalion. And PBS in 1985 did a beautiful film based on this. The star of it was the same man who was in "A Soldier's Story," "A Mind is a Terrible Thing to Waste." And if you can dig that up, I think that'll resonate with an Afro-German person, or any African American, because it deals with the irony, the paradox.

Mr. KANTARA. You know, I will certainly dig that up, because I think it looks interesting. But, you have to know, we—in Germany, we were occupied by American forces for over 40 years. And I think millions of African Americans went through Germany in their service, being soldiers, GIs, in Germany—in my country. And millions of them—men, you know, when you are 21 or something you're not—you're not a Catholic priest. So celibacy is not in there. And so you're going out in the discotheques and so on, and you have relationships.

Thousands upon thousands of black Germans were fathered by African American GIs. So we have, direct relations to the United States. [Laughter.] Quite a few, you know? So when you imagine it was, I think, the year 1955, the German Bundestag discussed the fate of black children in foster homes or children's homes. And they were already—just 10 years after the war—we already had some 10,000 black German kids, abandoned by their white German mothers. So, quite a few of them went to the United States, were actually adopted by African American servicemen and women. So there is a Black German Cultural Society in the United States.

Part of the reason why I'm here today is to raise awareness and say, hey, we're here. We're not many, that's true, but we're there. And we try to make a difference. And maybe we ought—you're doing Black History Month—to say to you all thank you, because you helped us a great deal with your struggle. Your struggle in the United States informed our struggle back home. Yes, I think that's very important to say. Thank you.

Dr. THOMPSON. Well, we would really like to thank you for being here, and just taking the time with us today. Some of you may know that last week Representative Hank Johnson's office held an event with actor Danny Glover, focused on the International Decade for People of African Descent, that two of our commissioners participated it—Senator Ben Cardin and Congresswoman Gwen Moore. They, in addition to Congressman Alcee Hastings, actually have legislation that they've put out related to raising awareness about people of African descent in Europe, as well as supporting issues around civil and human rights. And these are issues that the commission continues to work on.

In the beginning I talked about the fact that the commission has had a long history working on Roma, Jewish, and other populations in the region. They've also really worked within the OSCE to focus on people of African descent as well. And so if you look in the blue folders, on the last page, it actually details some of that work for people who are curious.

And then I think the last piece that's of interest, because we are speaking about Germany, is that populations in Europe are changing, just as they are in the United States. And so there's increasing diversity across the board. Estimates at this point are that there are about 12 to 15 million people of African descent in Europe. And there is also legisla-

tion on the table in Europe asking for specific policies around diversity and inclusion in Brussels and other places as well.

So this really is a transatlantic conversation, but it's a transatlantic conversation about our future. Whether it's our military and security futures, whether it's about our economies and what our work forces are going to look like, or whether it's about human and civil rights, it's a conversation that really impacts us all on both sides of the Atlantic.

And so, with that, I would like to say: Thank you all for joining us today. And Professor Kantara will be here for a little bit longer to answer any additional questions.

Mr. KANTARA. Thank you. [Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 3:08 p.m., the discussion ended.]

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