

Initiative: Speech at the opening of the memorial site, 26 September 2026

Dear Bangaly Condé,
Dear Usha Seejarim,
Dear survivors of emetic torture,
dear allies,
distinguished representatives of political institutions,

today we are able to jointly open this impressive memorial site, 'Death by Drowning'.

With this site, we commemorate Laye Alama Condé as a fatal victim of state violence and the many people who, between 1991 and 2004, were subjected to emetic torture by the Bremen police in 1,267 proven cases – and the number was likely higher.

For 13 long years, targeted racist persecution and, in effect, torture took place in our city. Following the death of Laye Alama Condé in January 2005, political figures sought to sweep their responsibility under the carpet for many years to come. This memorial site will stand as a powerful symbol against this silence, against these attempts at a cover-up, and against the defamation of Laye Condé – as an irrevocable part of Bremen's city history, as an irreversible symbol of truth and the demand for justice.

We are therefore delighted that today, together with the next generation of political leaders, we are opening this memorial site. Today, more than ever, we realise that it is not something to be taken for granted that you, as institutions, have faced up to your responsibilities, thereby enabling this memorial site to be realised.

For we also know this: Laye Alama Condé might still be alive today if your predecessors had not turned a blind eye to all human rights principles, if they had not – as the former mayor admitted many years later – if they had not, and I quote him, 'become entangled in a system of operational instructions'.

For it was not individual police officers who 'lost all sense of proportion', as the local newspaper **Weser-Kurier** recently put it – it was the entire Bremen police force that was behind the emetic torture and carried it out.

It was not individual judges and public prosecutors who accepted evidence obtained through torture in court proceedings for over a decade – it was the

entire judicial system and the responsible senators who did so.

It was not individual members of the State Parliament who voted in favour of introducing emetic torture and, following the killing of Achidi John in Hamburg in 2001, for its continuation – it was the overwhelming majority of that state parliament and all its senators.

And, not to be forgotten: it was the Bremen Medical Association that turned a blind eye for 13 years.

This is what we mean when we speak of the ‘system of emetic torture’.

If there is one thing we can learn from 13 years of emetic administration, it is this:

To fight against an unjust system, we always need people who have the courage to break free from that system; we always need specific individuals who do not go along with the prevailing discourse, *even though* it is so powerful and appears so convincing;

it requires those who say: “Human rights and human dignity are being violated here – this IS injustice!”

And this is true *even though* it has been enshrined in law or administrative directives.

This is what those directly affected did first and foremost, right from the start, when they reported and denounced the torture in police custody in the 1990s; this is what the activists of the Anti-Racism Office did publicly over many years, for which they were subjected to state repression; this is what Matthias Güldner, then a member of the City Parliament, did, who, following the death of Achidi John, called alongside his parliamentary group for an end to the use of emetics – and this was done, in a position of absolute central importance, by Abubacar Jalloh from Cologne, who, as a victim himself, fought his case through all the courts for 13 years, right up to the European Court of Human Rights, and thereby brought an end to the torture in 2006. We do not know Abubacar Jalloh personally, but we all owe him a great debt of gratitude.

So there is always a need for people who will counter those responsible for injustice and their administrative apparatus – who collectively claim that everything is as it should be – with a clear “NO, it is not!”.

We can extend this insight from the history of emetic torture to the present day and carry it forward into the future as a call to action for all of us.

And looking further ahead: at a time when politics is shifting further to the right, we will have to defend this memorial site and what it stands for – as we must defend so many other things. We must stand against the defamatory and destructive attacks from the right – even when they come from the so-called ‘centre of society’.

Further tasks also remain to be addressed for the future:

The many hundreds of victims and survivors of emetic torture must be given appropriate recognition by the state; they must receive concrete compensation for their suffering.

Emetic torture is history. Anti-Black racism and racial profiling, which made this method of torture possible in the first place, are not.

Excluding people, degrading them, dehumanising them is not a thing of the past, but a bitter reality of the present. Such racist exclusion from humanity ultimately condemns those excluded – and we must state this clearly here – to death.

Excesses of violence – including those perpetrated by the state – take place according to this principle of stigmatisation, exclusion and dehumanisation: from emetic torture and racist discrimination to militarisation at Europe’s external borders, with its tens of thousands of deaths.

This cannot be the world we want.

In this respect, our remembrance and our warnings must never cease; we must never rest. ‘To remember is to change; to remember is to fight!’ is a call to all of us for the future.

Thank you to all of you who have fought alongside us.

Thank you to everyone who continues to fight for remembrance, information and justice – and for a dignified, safe life for all.