The Nuremberg Declaration of the 2012 German Medical Assembly*

In 2012, the 115th German Medical Assembly is taking place in Nuremberg, the same city in which, 65 years ago, 20 physicians were indicted for medical crimes against humanity as leading representatives of the "state medical services" of the National Socialist state. Research carried out over past decades has shown that the scale of the human rights violations was even more extensive than presumed during the trials. Today we know significantly more about the aims and methods of the involuntary human experimentation carried out on many thousands of victims, which in many cases resulted in their death, as well as the murder of over 200,000 mentally ill and disabled people, and the forced sterilisation of over 360,000 people classified as "genetically diseased".

In contrast to assumptions still widely held today, the impetus for these most grievous violations of human rights did not originate from the political authorities, but from physicians themselves. These crimes were not the acts of individual physicians, but were carried out with the participation of leading representatives of the established medical profession and professional medical societies, as well as with significant involvement by distinguished medical academics and members of renowned biomedical research institutions.

These human rights violations committed by National Socialist medicine have left a lasting impact, and raise questions concerning the self-perception of physicians, their professional actions and medical ethics.

The 115th German Medical Assembly therefore states in its Nuremberg Declaration that:

- We acknowledge the significant shared responsibility of physicians for the injustices of National Socialist medicine and regard that which has happened as a warning for the present day and the future.

- We express our deepest regret that physicians, in contravention of their duty to treat, were complicit in multiple human rights violations. We commemorate the surviving victims and those who have already passed away, as well as their descendants, and ask for their forgiveness.

- As the German Medical Assembly, we pledge to work actively towards promoting future historical research and open evaluation by the professional bodies of the Federal Republic through direct financial and institutional support, such as ensuring unlimited access to archives.

Nuremberg, May 2012

*The original German version of the Nuremberg Declaration (Nürnberger Erklärung des Deutschen Ärztetages 2012) was adopted by the 115th German Medical Assembly in Nuremberg on 23 May 2012.