II.11 Heinrich Himmler’s speech to *Gauleiter* in Posen, Poland (6 Nov. 1943)

In this context and within this intimate circle I can refer to an issue which you, my fellow Party comrades, have all accepted as self-evident, but which has become for me the most difficult issue of my life, the Jewish issue. You all take it for granted as a self-evident and gratifying fact that there are no more Jews in your *Gau*. All Germans – with a few exceptions – are clear in their minds that we would not have held out against aerial bombardments and the pressures imposed by a fourth year of war, and maybe the fifth and sixth that lie in store, if we still had this plague destroying our people. The few words of the sentence ‘the Jews must be exterminated’ are easy to say. Yet for those who must carry out what it demands it is the hardest and most difficult thing there is. You see, of course they are Jews, it is obvious, they are only Jews, but think yourselves how many – even Party members – have made their famous request to me or some other authority stating that of course all Jews are swines, only that so-and-so is a decent Jew and should not be harmed. [ ... ] In Germany we have so many millions of people each of whom knows decent Jews that this figure is already bigger than the actual number of Jews. [...]

I ask you really only to listen to what I have to say in this circle, and never to talk about it. The question has arisen: What about women and children? I resolved to find an utterly clear solution for this as well. For I did not consider myself justified to eradicate the men – that means kill or have killed – and allow the avengers of their deaths to grow up in the form of the children and grandchildren. Thus the difficult decision had to be taken to make this people disappear from the face of the earth. For the organization which had to carry out this task it was the most difficult one we had ever had. It has been carried out – I believe I can say this – without inflicting damage on the minds and souls of our men and their leaders. The danger that it might was a real one. The path between the two possibilities of either being too cruel and heartless and losing respect for human life, or too soft and so suffering distress to the point of a nervous breakdown – the strait between this Scilla and Charybdis is narrow indeed. [...] With these words I would like to close the issue of the Jews. You know the score and will keep what you know to yourselves. At a future point we will perhaps be able to consider whether to tell the German people more about this
matter. I believe that it is better for us all to have endured this for our people, and accepted our responsibility (the responsibility for deeds not the idea behind them), and then take the secret with us to our graves.


**II.12 Extract from the report by the Police President of Hamburg on the raids on Hamburg in July and August 1943 (1 Dec. 1943)**

The rapidity with which the fires and firestorms developed, made every plan and every prospect of defence by the inhabitants purposeless. Houses, which in previous raids might have been preserved by the courageous efforts of Self Protection and other personnel, now fell victims to the flames. Before the necessity of flight could be realized, often every path to safety was cut off. After the alarm, Self Protection personnel in their shelters, fireguards of the Extended Self Protection and Works Air Protection Services in the places assigned to them, awaited the beginning and development of the raid. HE bombs and land mines in waves shook the houses to their foundations. Only very shortly after the first HE bombs had fallen an enormous number of fires caused by a great concentration of incendiary bombs – mixed with HE bombs – sprang up. People who now attempted to leave their shelters to see what the situation was or to fight the fires were met by a sea of flame. Everything round them was on fire. There was no water and with the huge number and size of the fires all attempts to extinguish them were hopeless from the start.

Many members of the Self Protection Service on their patrols or when courageously fighting the fires, were either buried by HE bombs or cut off by the rapid spread of the fires. The same fate overtook many fireguards in Extended Self Protection or Works Air Protection establishments while bravely doing their duty. One eyewitness report says: 'None knew where to begin firefighting'. The constant dropping of HE bombs and land mines kept driving people back into the shelters. The heat, which was becoming unbearable, showed plainly that there was no longer any question of putting out fires but only of saving their lives. Escape from the sea of flame seemed already impossible. Women, especially, hesitated to risk flight from the apparently safe shelter through the flames into the unknown. The continual falling of HE and incendiary bombs increased their fears. So people waited in the shelters until the heat and the obvious danger compelled some immediate action, unless action was forced upon them by rescue measures from outside. In many cases they were no longer able to act by themselves. They were already unconscious or dead from carbon monoxide poisoning. The house had collapsed or all the exits had been blocked. The fire had become a hurricane which made it impossible in most cases to reach the open. The firestorm raging over many square kilometres had cut off innumerable people without hope of rescue. Only those got away who had risked an early escape or happened to be so near the edge of the sea of fire