

Message from the Governing Mayor of Berlin

Berlin's history and the history of Jews in Berlin are closely intertwined. Jewish culture and Jewish life have enriched the city in many different ways. In that sense, the life stories of Jews in Berlin are stories about the city's history, too, which was shaped in part by Jewish men and women. At the same time, Berlin is also the city where the Holocaust began, which persecuted and killed millions throughout Europe and destroyed a thriving German-Jewish culture. Germany's national Holocaust memorial, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, bears witness to these crimes just a few feet away from Brandenburg Gate.

We must not and we will not forget the crimes committed against European Jews. Remembrance helps to prevent a relapse into barbarism. And it gives us the strength we need to shape the future of a tolerant, outward-looking city in which everyone can experience the diversity of religions, cultures, and lifestyles as a true advantage.

Today we are grateful not only for being able to live in peace and freedom in our reunified city, but for the fact that Berlin has again become a center of Jewish life.

In many different ways, today's Berlin recalls the centuries of close ties between the city and Jewish culture. Street names, signs and reminders on buildings or on the ground, and the Jewish Museum Berlin are as vital to this effort as the many remaining tombstones and cemeteries.

The stone that marked the grave of Jona ben Dan, who died in 1244 and was buried in the "*Judenkiewer*" in Spandau, is Berlin's oldest gravestone. And countless other places in Berlin recall a Jewish past that dates back to the city's early history – from the current excavations visible from the Berlin Town Hall of a place called the "*Jüdenhof*" and the Jewish cemeteries on Grosse Hamburger Strasse and Schönhauser Allee, now protected as historical monuments, to the Jewish cemeteries in Berlin-Weissensee, the small Adass Jisroel cemetery on Wittlicher Strasse and the rambling grounds of the "good place" on Herbert-Baum-Strasse.

"*A community that honors its dead honors itself*"; "*Beth ha Kewaroth – the House of Tombs*": The words of the Rabinatsassessor Dr. Frankl at the inauguration of the main Jewish cemetery in Weissensee on 9 September 1880 not only express the fundamental philosophy of Jewish burial culture, but are as meaningful today as ever. They exhort us to preserve the memory of the dead and underscore the material and conservational obligation to this legacy.

With Resolution No. 3990/2006 of 14 November 2006, the Berlin Senate approved the initiation of an application to have the Weissensee Jewish Cemetery included on Germany's "tentative list" of sites to be considered for nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Senate Chancery's cultural affairs department and the Berlin Monument Authority of the Senate Department for Urban Development were charged with preparing the application. Both of these, along with the Jewish Community of Berlin and Centrum Judaicum, agreed in 2007 to take an inventory of the cemetery based on the Operational Guidelines of the UNESCO World Heritage Convention and in line with scholarly criteria. The initial findings of the interdisciplinary working group led by the Technische Universität Berlin were presented as early as the spring of 2009 and, most recently, to a larger group of experts during the ICOMOS conference in the spring of 2011.

In the next few months, the German Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs is expecting Germany's 16 federal states to submit proposals to update the country's "tentative list" for nomination to the UNESCO World Heritage List. The Weissensee Jewish Cemetery is a proposal we want the Standing Conference to review and support. In the context of plans for 2013, when we will be marking the 80th anniversary of the National Socialist rise to power in January 1933 and the 75th anniversary of the pogroms of November 1938, the findings and recommendations of the group preparing the application could be discussed in depth in an exchange of opinion and experience with similar groups in Eastern and Central Europe, and cooperative projects could be initiated.

The Berlin Senate will keep the memory of the past alive and continue to do everything it can to ensure that Jews in Berlin feel safe and at home. We will work for an open, humane society characterized by mutual respect, one in which different cultures and religions live together and listen to each other. We regard the World Heritage proposal for the Weissensee Jewish Cemetery as an important contribution to achieving this goal and as a political commitment to the historical role of Jewish culture and the preservation of the Jewish legacy in Germany's capital city in general.

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