

AJC COMMITTEE NEWS

Founded in 1906, the American Jewish Committee seeks to protect the rights of Jews throughout the world; combats anti-Semitism and bigotry; works for the security of Israel; enhances human rights, democratic pluralism and intergroup understanding; and promotes the creative vitality of the Jewish people.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE OPENS HISTORIC BERLIN OFFICE WITH SPECIAL DEDICATION CEREMONIES; NEW ERA IN GERMAN-JEWISH RELATIONS BEGINS

BERLIN, GERMANY, Feb. 9, 1998.... The American Jewish Committee today officially opened and dedicated its office in Berlin. With the affixing of a mezuzah on the office doorpost, AJC becomes the first American Jewish organization to establish a full-time and permanent presence in Germany.

The dedication ceremonies, in the presence of German and Jewish leaders, is the highlight of three days of celebration. Beginning February 8, a 100-member delegation of AJC's Board of Governors, along with Jewish leaders from other European countries, are in Germany for numerous events prior to scheduled meetings in Israel, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey.

Following today's dedication of AJC's Berlin office, the group is attending a special reception at Schloss Bellvue (the Presidential Palace) hosted by the President of the Federal Republic of Germany, Prof. Dr. Roman Herzog. This evening, Foreign Minister Dr. Klaus Kinkel speaks at a gala dinner at the Hotel Adlon, attended by more than 500 German and Jewish dignitaries.

Eberhard Diepgen, the Lord Mayor of Berlin, hosted the opening reception for the AJC group, and AJC was welcomed at the Jewish Community Center by Dr. Andreas Nachama, President of the Berlin Jewish Community, and Ignatz Bubis, President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

U.S. Ambassador John Kornblum and Israeli Ambassador Dr. Avi Primor are participating in a discussion that will focus on U.S. and Israeli relations with Germany. Joining them will be Dr. Juergen Chrobog, Germany's Ambassador to the United States, who is traveling to Berlin to participate in AJC's opening festivities. On the group's final day a panel discussion will be held on the future of Germany and German - Jewish relations, and AJC leaders will tour the New Synagogue/Centrum Judaicum.

"Shortly after the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany in 1949, AJC, at first tentatively after much anguished soul-searching, later with increasing gusto, began to search out in the new Germany those forces -- governmental and non-governmental -- genuinely committed to writing a new chapter in German - Jewish relations," said David A. Harris, AJC's Executive Director.

"Germany was simply too important to walk away from, however much our emotions might understandably tell us otherwise," Mr. Harris added. "The AJC decision, with the added



American Jewish Committee

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AJC also maintains regional offices in 32 major cities across the U.S.

benefit today of hindsight, proved farsighted. With Germany's future the key to Europe's, and with Germany today astonishingly the home of the fastest-growing Jewish community in the world, there is every reason to be present on the ground -- as advocates for closer German - American ties, as friends of the soon-to-be 100,000-strong Jewish community, and, not least of course, as supporters of those who insist on holding Germany to the very highest democratic standards that its own postwar leaders have set for it."

"The opening of AJC's office in Berlin allows us to bring to Germany the creativity and intellectual stimulation of the American Jewish organization most deeply involved in all the critical issues surrounding German - Jewish relations," said Eugene DuBow, Managing Director of the Berlin Office. "As we embark upon this journey, we are ever mindful of the anguished bond thrust upon our peoples as a result of the Holocaust. AJC is seeking productive ways to come to terms with the past and learn the lessons that will allow us to work and live together for the betterment of all humankind."

Mr. DuBow, a veteran of the American Jewish Committee for more than three decades, most recently as former director in charge of supervision of AJC field offices across the United States, has long been involved in programs dealing with American Jewish-German reconciliation. In the early 1980's, Mr. DuBow was one of the early facilitators of AJC's exchange program with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. During that same period, he developed the first contacts with the isolated Jewish community of East Berlin (DDR) and served as a major American Jewish link to them for some years. After a series of negotiations with the East German government, he was able to arrange for a rabbi to move to East Berlin and become the first practicing rabbi to take up a pulpit in that country in more than 20 years. In 1995, he served as a Guest Professor in the Lehrstuhl für Politische Soziologie at the Bayreuth University in Bavaria. In 1996, he was awarded the Bundesverdienstkreuz (Officer's Cross of the Order of Merit) by order of President Herzog for his decades of devotion to the cause of improved German - Jewish relations.

Rabbi Andrew Baker, AJC's Director of European Affairs, who is based in Washington, DC, commented that "AJC's presence in Berlin will dramatically expand our programmatic outreach throughout Europe. The conferences, exchange programs, research and publications that we are already much heralded for will now take on a deeper and more immediate impact in the region."

AJC's Berlin Office houses the Lawrence and Lee Ramer Center for German - Jewish Relations. Mr. and Mrs. Ramer, of Los Angeles, California, have been dedicated supporters of AJC's programs in Germany for a number of years. Mr. Ramer is a National Officer of AJC. Further, the office will include the Dr. Hans Adler Library, in honor of the father of Dottie Bennett of Falls Church, Virginia. Ms. Bennett is a member of AJC's Board of Governors and president of the Washington, D.C., Chapter. The Library, which will devote itself in large part to American Jewry, will be available to scholars and researchers. The office will also include the

Mitzi Spiegel Executive Office, named in honor of the mother of Daniel Spiegel. Mr. Spiegel, from Minneapolis, Minnesota, is also a member of AJC's Board of Governors.

The Berlin office was given to AJC rent-free for the next ten years as a gift from Hans Roeder, the Berlin builder [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Mr. Strauch in turn conferred with David Squire, a member of AJC's Board of Governors and fellow Bostonian. Upon accepting the offer, Mr. Harris noted: "Mr. Roeder's generosity has given wings to an historic event and made possible the extension of AJC's programs geared toward understanding and intergroup cooperation in Europe's center. By undertaking this enterprise, AJC hopes and expects that American Jews and Germans can expand still further their points of contact and develop additional projects of common interest as the new century dawns."

AJC's work with Germany dates back to the late 1940's when the agency supported programs to teach and strengthen democracy in the German school system following World War II. In the early 1980's AJC began exchange programs with the Konrad Adenauer, Fredrich Ebert, Friedrich Naumann and Heinrich Boell Foundations, which carry through to this day. In addition, AJC officers and staff continue to meet regularly with high-ranking representatives of the German government, the armed forces, the intelligentsia, the churches and other important segments of German society to discuss issues of concern and identify areas of mutual cooperation.

The American Jewish Committee, founded in the United States in 1906 by a small group of predominantly German-Jewish Americans, is America's oldest human-relations organization. AJC was established to combat anti-Semitism at home and abroad, and has since developed into an organization with a broad agenda encompassing domestic and international concerns to the Jewish community. AJC maintains thirty-two offices in cities across the United States, as well as an Israel/Middle East Office in Jerusalem and professional affiliations and partnerships in Poland, Great Britain and Australia. AJC has approximately 70,000 members and supporters.