

Grußwort Mittagessen, 10. März 2023, Landesvertretung Hamburg in Berlin

Dear state secretary, Dr. Gümbel, dear Ambassador Ron Prosor, dear Prof. Ron Robin, dear Prof. Mouna Maroun and friends from Haifa, dear members and supporters of our work, dear guests,

we are extremely grateful for this festive luncheon in this beautiful embassy of Hamburg in Berlin.

Here in Jägerstrasse in Berlin there was once a vibrant Jewish life – Berlin Jews like the Mendelssohn family, the intellectual Rachel Vanhagen, the banker Adolf Jarislowski, the jiddisch cabaret “Kaftan”. They all felt completely integrated in the Berlin society – only to find out that they were absolutely not – just because they were Jews. It has a special meaning to me – to the German Friends - that we are celebrating 50 years of the University of Haifa exactly here. Thank you once more!

And before anything else: I do want to thank also your wonderful team in Hamburg and here in Berlin and of course the small and enthusiastic team of the German Friends office: Magdalena Backhaus, Juliana Hoffmann and Alexandra Stöckigt. Thank you so very much!! You made this all possible.

Let me mention an old story.

It was in the Eighties when the first Israeli cities and municipalities declared their readiness to enter into a partnership with German counterparts. Such a partnership between Hamburg and Haifa was sounded out. It would have been only natural – partnering the leading port cities of both countries and their liberal traditions. Unfortunately, the Hamburg Senate was caught up in a complicated discussion, our traditional rival Bremen got hold of these difficulties and partnered with Haifa. And Hamburg’s partner?

Well – we found Ben Gurion’s home town Sde Boker in the Negev desert. Not that bad either but widely unknown and inactive.

Nevertheless, relations between our cities have developed well, especially on the scientific and academic front. Eminent citizens of Hamburg such as the Warburg family, Peter Dietrich or Rainer Funke have co-founded our German friends’ association. There are many contacts and common projects between academics of Haifa University, Hamburg University, the Bucerius Law School – as there are between the Technische Universität Hamburg and the Technion. There remain fields to be cultivated, of course. Marine sciences come to my mind for one where our university is an undisputed leader well beyond Israel.

And, Dr. Gümbel – when we last talked, we agreed that the next official visit from Hamburg to Israel absolutely must include our university. As they say: Jerusalem might be the most beautiful city in the world but Haifa is the most beautiful one in Israel. More than that: it is the most diverse, colourful and tolerant place in Israel, a true completely mixed city – and no matter what happens, I know it will stay that way.

In Hamburg, Jewish life is thriving – not only in the traditional Grindel quarter. And in Haifa’s German Colony Jews and Arabs still share the tables in its inviting restaurants. May this become one day a normality for Israel and the Middle East and not remain an exception. May the day come when the police station in front of the Talmud Tora school in Hamburg is no longer needed, when Jews and Palestinians alike can live in good neighbourhood. This hope is worth a fight, indeed! And the friendship bridge to Germany started by those committed individuals 50 years ago in Hamburg will never break!

Mazol Tov and L’Chaim!!

10. 03. 2023

Sonja Lahnstein