

25th anniversary of town twinning between Tirat Carmel and Monheim am Rhein

Speech of the mayor of Monheim am Rhein Mr. Daniel Zimmermann

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to our anniversary celebration. The committee (Arbeitskreis) „Partnership with Israel“, the Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium and the city of Monheim organized this event together in order to celebrate with you, with all friends of Tirat Carmel, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of our town twinning. It is very nice that so many people have come to honor this special event.

First of all I'd like to welcome our friends and guests from Israel. We are glad to welcome a large delegation. It is led by our friend, the mayor of Tirat Carmel, Mr. Arie Tal. I am also pleased to welcome the members of the official delegation from Tirat Carmel

- Mr. Morris Asayag – vice mayor
- Mr. Morris Binyamin – council member
- Mrs. Hinda Fridelman – council member
- Mr. Shmouel Katoni – city manager
- Mr. Yoav Balas– head of security department
- Mr. Zion Sudri – head of youth department
- Mrs. Irma Aloashvilly – manager of the mayor's office

The essential and strong fundament of our town twinning is the school exchange between the Shifman High School and the Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium. That's why I'd like to welcome all the members of the Israeli youth group. I am especially glad that you are here.

The youth group is accompanied by their teachers and some official guests whom I also want to welcome very warmly

- Irit Zelig – headmaster of Shifman High School
- together with her husband Mendi
- Eli Fedida – vice headmaster of Shifman High School and holder of the honorary ring of the city of Monheim
- Hanna Kratu
- Anat Kenig

It is your achievement that the youth exchange already exists for 26 years. Thank you very much for your commitment and dedication towards the town twinning and the exchange program.

Amongst the German guests I am glad to welcome our honorary mayor Mrs. Ingeborg Friebe. I am also glad that our former mayor Dr. Hans-Dieter Kursawe who is as well a former headmaster of the Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium is with us. Mr. Kursawe is celebrating his birthday today. So thank you very much for attending this ceremony and happy birthday, Mr. Kursawe. I also like to welcome

- Mr. Jens Geyer – member of the state parliament of North Rhine-Westphalia
- Mr. Hagen Bastian – headmaster of the Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium
- Hans-Joachim Wegner – former city manager of Monheim am Rhein
- all the members of the city council of Monheim am Rhein and
- all the representatives of the “Arbeitskreis Partnerschaft mit Israel”, the committee of partnership with Israel

Mentioning the school exchange as an important basis for our town twinning, I also have to thank all the parents, participants and teachers of the current and previous exchanges. We have invited everybody who has ever participated during the last 26 years. I am glad that so many of you were able to come. Welcome to this ceremony!

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 1987, Hagen Bastian and Werner Köhl had the idea to initiate a youth exchange with Israel. Since I know that Mr. Bastian will tell us more about the beginning of the partnership in his speech, I only want to make a few comments on this period of time. Through the protestant church, contact to a city in the North of Israel was established. The city was called Tirat Carmel. Hagen Bastian and Werner Köhl travelled to Israel and they managed to convince the mayor of that time, Mr. Reuven Biener, of their idea. Reuven Biener supported the establishment of the exchange program. And the Shifman High School could be found as a partner.

In the spring of 1988, 16 young people from Monheim travelled to Tirat Carmel for the first time. Köhl and Bastian were in charge of this trip. Shortly after that the first Israeli group came to Monheim. And like every other group coming during the next three decades they were accompanied by Eli Fedida.

The contact that started as a youth exchange soon became a town twinning which was contracted officially in July 1989. One thing has never changed: Until now, the student exchange is the most important element of this town twinning. Every year students from Tirat Carmel come to Monheim and vice versa. Since 1988, approximately 600 young people from Monheim travelled to Tirat Carmel and the same number of young people from Tirat Carmel came to Germany. The fact, that this student exchange is successful to such an extend, makes us glad and proud. I want to thank all those who took care of the students, especially Eli Fedida, Hagen Bastian and all the teachers from both Shifman High School and Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium.

Twenty-six years of exchange have provided the participants with a better and exacter picture of the partner country. Regarding the historic background of the two countries, this is something especially extraordinary. Only seventy years ago Germany was the country of concentration camps where people were persecuted, deprived of their rights and murdered. The memory of this time period will always have its place in our town twinning. But young Israelis who come to Monheim in the context of the student exchange also get to know Germany as a country which gives its past serious thoughts and is today a stable and pluralistic state under the rule of law and human rights. Young Germans who travel to Tirat Carmel learn that the people of Israel yearn for peace, especially in hardships as we face today in the Middle East, that they have hopes, wishes and plans like people in any country of the European Union. By going to Israel young Germans experience the necessity of a democracy so close to ours making legitimate use of its right of self defence.

These insights from both directions can not be gained by watching television, not by surfing the internet and not by reading the newspaper. They can only be gained when our students travel to the other country and get to know others who share the same values and hopes. They can only be gained when friendships are established which create relations and common grounds that stretch across thousands of kilometers.

On both sides there are persons who support the town twinning and the student exchange with their whole hearts and who have made irreplaceable contribution to the close relationships between people from both cities. Quite a few town twinings exist between Israeli and German communities. But only rarely are those relations as deep and supported by as many people on both sides as in the case of the town twinning between Monheim am Rhein and Tirat Carmel.

That is why I want to thank every participant who has helped during the last twenty-five years to make the town twinning a lively and successful project. My big wish for the future is that we will manage together to keep up and deepen the good relations between our cities and I invite all of you to participate in this big cross cultural adventure.