

Decoration of Eli Fedida with the Honorary Ring of Monheim am Rhein

Speech by the mayor of Monheim am Rhein, Daniel Zimmermann, 12th December 2009

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I'm glad that the Big Band of the Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium, led by Christian Kilburg, has agreed to accompany this event musically. The song they just played is called "Oye Como Va" by Tito Puente.

I would like to welcome you to this ceremony, which was planned to be a surprise. Everybody of you knows why we have come together except for one man. I don't even know under which pretext his friends made him come to the town hall, but he is here. His name is Mr. Eli Fedida.

Dear Eli, I hope that we managed to surprise you. We have come together because we want to decorate you, Eli, with the so called honorary ring of Monheim. I am glad that you are with us and I welcome you very warmly.

But before we get to the actual decoration, I am pleased to welcome some special guests as well. First of all, there is Mr. Arie Tal, mayor of our Israelian twin town Tirat Carmel. Next to him, there is Mr. Shmulik Katoni, the city director of Tirat Carmel. Furthermore I'd like to welcome Mrs. Rivka Shargil, headmaster of the Shifman Highschool, who brought along her husband.

Of course I am also very pleased that once again we have the honour to host a group of students from this highschool. You will stay in Monheim a couple of days and I am really looking forward to the play that you are going to perform with your host students from Monheim. The performance will take place next Thursday in the assembly hall of the Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium.

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 today. Furthermore, I welcome Mrs. Michaela Noll, member of the German Bundestag.

Eli, you are not the first one who is decorated with the honorary ring of the City of Monheim, but there are only few who carry it. Since 1991, the honorary ring has been awarded only seven times. Two of these people have unfortunately already passed away, but all the others are here today. There are in the order of decoration: Mrs Ingeborg Friebe, Dr. Rolf Schwarz-Schütte, Mr. Karl König, Mr. Emil Drösser und Mr. Martin Brüske. I am very glad that all of you, the members of the town council and all the other guests can be here with us.

Before we continue, the Big Band is going to entertain us again with the song "Georgia on My Mind" by Horgy Carmichael.

Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

About twenty-three years ago, Hagen Bastian and Werner Köhl had the idea to initiate a youth exchange with Israel. Through the protestant church, contact to a city in the North of Israel was established: This city was called Tirat Carmel. So, they travelled to Israel and they

managed to convince the mayor of that time, Mr. Biener Reuven, of their idea. Biener Reuven 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 travelled to Tirat Carmel for the first time. Köhl and Bastian were in charge of this trip.

It started as a youth exchange but soon became a town twinning which was contracted officially in 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 from Monheim and vice versa. Only in very few times of crisis, German groups couldn't travel to Israel. Since 1988, approximately 500 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 extent is mostly due to Eli Fedida. His students call him affectionately "the most beautiful man in the world". We from Monheim know him as well as the only Israeli who is able to sing our song, the so-called "Gänseliesellied".

Eli is a multifunctional man: He is not only a history teacher, he is a father figure, he is a true entertainer and he is the one who cheers up homesick students on their first trip outside Israel.

Right now you are staying in Monheim because of the project „Europeans for Peace“. Shifman High School and Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium are taking part for the third time in this project. When I was in Israel two months ago, I realized how much importance you attach to it. "Europeans for Peace is" a programme of the foundation "Remembrance, Responsibility and Future" which encourages young people to engage themselves in society and to become aware of historical facts. The foundation provides financial support for project meetings between young people from Germany and Israel or countries in Central or Eastern Europe. Its aim is on the one hand to keeping alive the remembrance of the crimes and injustice committed during the Nazi era and to keeping alive the remembrance of the victims. On the other hand the programme encourages people to be active in safeguarding minorities, human rights and peace nowadays.

Young people use their creativity and commitment in this project. They are linking the past with their own responsibility for protecting human rights today. And in doing so, they form friendships and make their own personal contribution to international and cultural understanding. I think the description of the foundation's activities can be transferred very well to the intention of the school exchanges between our two cities in general.

In 2006 and 2008, the Shifman High School and the Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium were awarded with the first prize for their participation in the project "Europeans for Peace". This is also owing to Eli Fedida who has organized the Israeli part of this project and accompanied its realisation.

In a session on October the 27th, the town council of Monheim has decided without any dissentient vote to decorate you with the honorary ring of the City of Monheim. You were proposed by the "Arbeitskreis Partnerschaft mit Israel". In the proposition it says:

Mr. Eli Fedida has already accompanied 24 groups of students and other young people from Tirat Carmel on trips to Monheim. All over, more than 500 young people from our twin city Tirat Carmel have visited us in Monheim because of the town twinning.

In spite of the great number of political difficulties throughout the past decades, i.e. 1st Intifada, 2nd Intifada, Lebanon War, Mr. Eli Fedida has without even one year of interruption

continued to work on the partnership. It is especially due to him that the partnership between Monheim and Tirat Carmel is so vivid, so steady and so successful.

In doing so, he has rendered a service to the German-Israeli relations on the local level. Regarding German history and especially the Shoa, his commitment for national understanding has helped many of our young people to create a different, very positive image of Israel and its people.

There's no need to add a lot, maybe only some personal impressions. Eli has got a lot of empathy concerning his students which makes him a special teacher. Parents who entrust him year after year with their children are aware of this fact. Some parents wouldn't even let their children go to Germany if it weren't for their trust in Eli. In addition Eli ensures every year that there are enough families in Tirat Carmel who are willing to host German exchange students. That is also an achievement which shouldn't be underestimated.

I myself have got to know Eli ten years ago. Then I was a student at the Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium and could travel to Israel. Not only did we have a lot of fun with him and our exchange students, we could also absolutely rely on him. One student has experienced that in a special situation: Because of an acute appendicitis she had to be taken to hospital. Eli took care of her like a second father and made her feel secure and well-attended.

Thank you, Eli, for all your commitment to this town twinning.