

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
dear Mr. Ambassador,
dear friends from Tirat Carmel,

Shalom and welcome to Monheim's Israeli quarter. I am delighted to have you here to participate and share in today's inauguration ceremony. Thank you all for coming.

I'd like to express my deepest appreciation for the fact that His Excellency Mr. Jeremy Issacharoff, the Ambassador of Israel, is with us today. Let me offer you, Mr. Ambassador, on behalf of all those who are present here, our most grateful welcome.

It's my pleasure to extend a warm welcome to my friend, Mr. Arie Tal, the mayor of Tirat Carmel. I am glad to have you here together with Mr. Shmulik Katoni, the city director of Tirat Carmel, Mr. Shlomo Dahan, head of Tirat Carmel's department of education, and Mr. Boris Tikman, manager of urban planning in Tirat Carmel.

I'd like to welcome furthermore the former president of the state parliament of North Rhine Westphalia and honorary mayor of Monheim am Rhein Mrs Ingeborg Friebe, the administrative head of the district of Mettmann, Mr. Thomas Hendele, the former mayor of Monheim, Mr. Hans-Dieter Kursawe, and Mr. Hagen Bastian, the headmaster of Otto-Hahn-Gymnasium and chairman of Monheim's German-Israeli friendship association.

Today, after 31 years of exchange between Tirat Carmel and Monheim am Rhein, we want to make another step forward in strengthening our friendship. One and a half years ago, the city council of Monheim has decided (without a single vote against) to name the five new streets in this area after Tirat Carmel and four Jewish or Israeli personalities.

This can be seen as our birthday present on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the foundation of the state of Israel. And in fact, it really expresses our deep solidarity with Israel and the Israeli people.

But the naming decision is also supposed to be a symbol of gratitude for the deep and vivid friendship that has grown between the people of our two cities. As far as I know, there is no quarter with street names like this anywhere else in Germany, but as far as I know, there is probably no town twinning like ours either.

During the last 31 years one thousand young people from every of the two cities have already stayed in host families in their twin town. And if you also take their parents, brothers and sisters into consideration, we have a huge number of people who already got involved in the town twinning. I myself had the chance to take part in the school exchange between Tirat Carmel and Monheim when I was a 17-year-old boy. I got to know lovely people whom I had the opportunity to become friends with. It was an experience that I will keep in my heart for the rest of my life.

Beyond the friendships that I've made this is especially for the reason that just as today the exchange's agenda was not simply filled with leisure. It was also marked by the effort of studying together with both the Israeli and the German pupils our history. We met with Holocaust survivors and learned together about the Shoah - as part of history that at the same time connects and separates Israelis and Germans.

It's the main objective of town twinnings to bring people together, to make them reflect their personal attitudes and to create a common understanding. And I am glad that our two cities managed to achieve this main objective. The attitude of reflection also led us to carefully choose together with our friends in Tirat Carmel the five street names that we will inaugurate today.

We see Hanna Szenes as a hero of Jewish resistance against German totalitarianism and crime, Henrietta Szold is honored because she rescued thousands of children from Holocaust, amongst them there might have also been a girl from Monheim. And we have chosen Menachim Begin and Yitzhak Rabin because they were decorated with the Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts for peace.

It's exactly these human values that are creating the basis of our friendship: The rejection of discrimination and antisemitism, intercultural understanding, the empathy for others and a strong will to life in freedom and peace.

I want to thank all those who support the town twinning on both sides. Thank you, dear Mr. Mayor, dear Arie for your dedication to the town twinning and for your friendship. I can promise for my part and I know that you think the same, that we will constantly work on improve the ties and the friendship between Tirat Carmel and Monheim. May many people from both cities become friends with each other.

But finally, I'd also like to say: Happy birthday, Israel.