



A LIVING  
MEMORIAL  
TO THE  
HOLOCAUST

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
June 12, 2006

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## **Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust to Merge with the Auschwitz Jewish Center in Poland** *New York Museum to be Responsible for Operations of Historic Site in Poland*

New York, NY – The Board of Trustees of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust voted last week, without dissent, to enter into final negotiations with the Auschwitz Jewish Center to merge the Center with the Museum. Under the agreement, the Museum will assume responsibility for the operations and programming of the Center. Located just three kilometers from the Auschwitz – Birkenau Death Camp, the Center provides a place for individuals and groups from around the world to learn about the vibrancy of Jewish culture, and memorialize victims of the Holocaust. Among its facilities is the town of Oswiecim’s only surviving synagogue, and the only Jewish presence in Auschwitz.

“Without question, the combined facilities of the Auschwitz Jewish Center represent a unique asset for the Jewish people – a place of prayer, study, and commemoration – within a few kilometers of perhaps the darkest spot on earth,” said Dr. David G. Marwell, Director of the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. “The symbolic power of this institution cannot be overestimated, and its potential to educate and move people is boundless.” Dr. Marwell will have overall responsibility for the combined institution once the agreement is finalized.

The joining of these two institutions will provide important benefits to both. The Museum will gain an international presence, which will allow it to expand its educational programs. The Center will become part of a respected professional organization with access to all of its resources. This new relationship will provide the Center with the opportunity to expand its offerings and take better advantage of its historic location. Even with the changes, each will continue to exist as separate and distinct institutions with their own identities.

“As the only Jewish presence in the vicinity of any death camp, the Auschwitz Jewish Center is in a unique position to educate the world about the profound loss suffered during the Holocaust by juxtaposing the enormity of the anonymous deaths and suffering perpetrated at Auschwitz – Birkenau with the once thriving Jewish community that inhabited the nearby town,” said Fred Schwartz, the President Emeritus and Founder of the Center. “This marriage creates a valuable and sustainable partnership between the two entities that will allow both to flourish.”

“I am delighted that the Museum will be working with the Auschwitz Jewish Center,” said Robert M. Morgenthau, the Chairman of the Museum. “It will bolster our commitment to the dual principles that we will never forget the horrors of the Holocaust, and we will remember the rich Jewish culture that thrived in Poland before the Holocaust. The vote by the Museum’s Board of Trustees is testament to the importance of this new relationship between our Museum and the Auschwitz Jewish Center.”

### **About the Auschwitz Jewish Center**

In 2000 the Auschwitz Jewish Center opened its doors with a two-fold mission: to provide a place for individuals and groups from around the world to learn about the vibrancy of Jewish culture through exhibits, lectures, and educational programs; and to serve as a haven where visitors to the Auschwitz – Birkenau camps can memorialize Jewish victims of the Holocaust and commemorate the rich Jewish – Polish life and culture eradicated during World War II.

*(More)*

Two unique educational programs are administered by the AJCF. The U.S. Service Academy Program takes four students each from the United States Military Academy at West Point, the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, and the United States Naval Academy at Annapolis and sends them on a three-week trip to Poland to visit sites and learn from survivors, scholars, historians, and journalists. This year's cadets participated in a send-off ceremony at the Museum in New York on June 7 before leaving for Poland.

The five-year-old Student Scholar Program brings together eight to 12 graduate students of exceptional ability and leadership potential for an eight-week immersive program in Poland, preceded by orientation in New York City.

Among the Center's important facilities are the Chevra Lomdei Mishnayot Synagogue, Oswiecim's only surviving synagogue, restored to a place of sanctuary and remembrance. The Center's holdings also include the Site of the former Great Synagogue of Oswiecim, now an empty space. In 2004 the Center recovered more than 300 ceremonial objects and Judaica, which had been buried by the Jews of Oswiecim beneath the Great Synagogue before it was burned by the Nazis. Unlike most pre-war items found in Eastern Europe, these items survived the war untouched by the Nazis. The Jewish Cultural and Educational Center offers visitors exhibitions and cultural programs, as well as meeting and research facilities.

The Center is located three kilometers away from the Auschwitz – Birkenau Death Camp complex. At the time that the Nazis occupied Oswiecim in 1939 and renamed it Auschwitz, there were 8,000 Jews living there. Today, the Auschwitz Jewish Center is the remaining Jewish presence in the area.

### **About the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust**

Since its doors opened in September 1997, more than three-quarters of a million men, women, and children from around the world have visited the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, and have left with a better understanding of the 20th-century Jewish experience.

The 112,000-square-foot waterfront Museum with its six-sided shape and tiered roof symbolic of the six points of the Star of David and the six million Jews who perished in the Holocaust, has proven to be a powerful attraction for local residents and tourists alike.

The three-floor Core Exhibition at the Museum goes beyond recounting the horrors of the Holocaust. Its mission is to educate people of all ages and backgrounds about the broad tapestry of Jewish life over the past century – before, during, and after the Holocaust. It transcends religious, ethnic, and denominational differences to raise to a new level of human comprehension the horror and tragedies of the Holocaust, while at the same time celebrating the richness of Jewish culture and the strength of the Jewish people. Current special exhibitions include *Ours To Fight For: American Jews in the Second World War*, which explores the lives of Jewish men and women who served during WWII.

As an educational institution, the Museum is committed to serving students and instructors from a broad spectrum of schools. The Museum offers guided class visits led by trained Gallery Educators, pre- and post-visit curriculum materials, classroom speakers, and educator training workshops – all designed to integrate the Museum visit into the process of classroom learning.

The Museum offers visitors a vibrant public program schedule in its Edmond J. Safra Hall. It is also home to Andy Goldsworthy's memorial *Garden of Stones*, as well as James Carpenter's *Reflection Passage*, Gift of The Gruss Lipper Foundation. The Museum receives general operating support from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and is a founding member of the *Museums of Lower Manhattan*.

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