



**THE MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF POLISH JEWS  
 ANNOUNCES**

**OFFICIAL GROUNDBREAKING: JUNE 26, 2007**

**MUSEUM TO SERVE AS WORLD'S  
 ONLY INSTITUTION TO TRACE  
 1,000-YEAR HISTORY OF POLISH JEWS**

**\$65 MILLION MUSEUM TO OPEN IN 2009  
 OVER 500,000 ANNUAL VISITORS EXPECTED**

WARSAW, POLAND: JUNE 13, 2007 – The Museum of the History of Polish Jews announces that its official groundbreaking will take place on June 26, 2007. The ceremony will include the participation of **Polish President Lech Kaczynski** and Israeli statesman **Shimon Peres** and marks the beginning of construction of this important new cultural institution. After nearly a decade of planning, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews will begin to rise on the site of the former Warsaw Ghetto, directly across from Nathan Rappaport's *Memorial of the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto*. Scheduled to open in 2009, the 140,000-square-foot museum will feature eight central galleries dedicated to telling the story of Jews in Poland from the Middle Ages to today. The displays incorporate state-of-the-art multimedia installations that showcase the museum's collection, including an archive that represents over 60,000 objects collected from around the world. The building is designed by the Finnish architectural team Rainer Mahlamäki and Ilmari Lahdelma, selected in 2005 after an international competition. Over 10 million Americans are of Polish descent and 50% of the world's Jews can trace their ancestry to Poland. This museum will serve people of all faiths and nationalities in educating them about history and tolerance by recounting 1,000 years of Jewish life in Poland.

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews (MHPJ) is expected to cost at least \$65 million, not including the value of the land in central Warsaw. It is one of the first institutions in post European-Union Poland to be built through a partnership of public and private support. Public donors include the Polish Government (\$13 million), the City of Warsaw (\$13 million and over 3 acres of land), and donors from other public and corporate entities in the U.S. and Europe. The German government has given approximately \$6.5 million to the project. The Museum also has many private donors, nearly a dozen of whom have given at or above the one million dollar level, as well as individual, corporate and foundation benefactors from the U.S. and Canada, Israel, and throughout Europe. The \$65 million dollar budget includes \$33 million for construction and \$32 million for the exhibitions. To date, more than \$45.5 million has been raised through gifts and pledges, with significant contributions from North American patrons. A crowning example of public-private collaboration in contemporary Europe, the Museum's diverse funding highlights how coexisting agendas among government entities and individual donors can serve a higher purpose in informing new generations of the world's citizens in the name of education, enlightenment, respect, tolerance and commemoration.

Sigmund A. Rolat, Chairman of the North American Council of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, has expressed why the project is so important to many of the world's citizens: "Ever since the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D, and up until 1939, more Jews lived in Poland than anywhere else. When Spain and Portugal expelled their Jews, Jews were safe and granted privileges in Poland. Jews have fought in Poland's wars, enhanced Poland's commercial and cultural successes, helped build the State of Israel, and won Nobel prizes. My children and grandchildren and young people everywhere must know this."

The museum is a project of the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute. The Museum Director is Polish historian Jerzy Halbersztadt.

## **FACILITIES**

### **Permanent Exhibition Galleries**

The MHPJ is a 140,000 square-foot interactive, narrative museum where exhibitions are designed to tell the story of historical events rather than focus on the presentation of objects, artworks or artifacts. The eight galleries that house the museum's core exhibition provide 43,000 square-feet of space and will be equipped with the latest technological capacities to showcase a variety of multimedia techniques. Videos, films, computer-generated holograms, as well as traditional three-dimensional scale models, will together enable visitors to experience first-hand the presentation of 1,000 years of life in Poland.

After entering the exhibition through a primeval forest, visitors will travel through eight distinct galleries, one for each major period in the 10 centuries of Jewish life in Poland. They will experience what life was like in Poland in the past and explore issues facing Jews today - in Poland and around the world. The core exhibition covers the following:

- 1) First Encounters & First Settlements: Jews in the Polish lands: 10<sup>th</sup> through 15<sup>th</sup> centuries
- 2) Paradisus Judeorum: Flowering of Jewish civilizations: 16<sup>th</sup> to mid-17<sup>th</sup> centuries
- 3) Into the Country: mid- 17<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century
- 4) Encounters with Modernity: the 19<sup>th</sup> century
- 5) The Street: The Second Polish Republic (1921 - 1939)
- 6) The Holocaust: 1939-1945
- 7) The Post War Years: 1946 to the Present

The backbone of the permanent exhibition is being developed by a team of scholars, historians and museum experts from Poland, Europe, Israel and the United States. Professor Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett of New York University heads the Core Exhibition Planning Team. The daughter of Polish Jews who emigrated to the United States before the Holocaust, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett is trained as a cultural anthropologist and has written seven books and countless articles on the subject of Jewish culture throughout history.

### **Educational Programming**

A crown-jewel of the museum and key element to serving adults and children of all ages will be the 5,400 square-foot, state-of-the-art education center. Designed to address the needs of individuals, families, students and teachers, multimedia displays and web-based kiosks will share the Museum's database of 60,000 documents and objects with audiences from Poland and abroad. Visitors will have access to a reading room, library and individual study stations staffed by museum professionals to help guide research and exploration.

A national program of museum classes is one of the most popular forms for out-of-classroom experiences in Poland. During the last several years, over 500,000 Polish students each year have participated in this

form of instruction. The Museum will be a welcome addition to this program. School groups and tours of visitors will also have several multimedia rooms and 500-seat auditorium at their disposal, where frequent opportunities abound to participate in lectures, conferences, and screenings offered by the Museum's education team.

### **ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN**

The Museum's Finnish architectural team of Rainer Mahlamäki and Ilmari Lahdelma was selected in 2005 after an international competition conducted by a jury of 13 architectural scholars, museum directors and cultural affairs professionals from around the world. This competition was the first of its kind in Poland. The winning design prevailed over 117 architectural submissions and 10 other short-listed entries, including those submitted by Studio Daniel Libeskind, Peter Eisenman Architects, Kengo Kuma and Zvi Hecker.

The museum exterior is square in plan to echo the shape of the plaza on which it is situated but the transparent glass walls reveal an interior of organic, undulating forms. The design alludes to the Old Testament's miraculous parting of the Red Sea through which the prophet Moses led the Jews to escape captivity in Egypt to life in the Promised Land. The curved walls and ceiling are faced in limestone and lit from above, providing a dramatic sight from both interior and exterior viewpoints. In this way, the museum's design foregrounds the life of the Jewish people over any particular catastrophic events in history, and its transparency reflects the desire for a truthful reckoning of the past.

Many of the complex architectural details of the five-story cultural center are the result of computer-aided design (CAD) programs and 3-D modeling. The soaring entrance hall reaches from ground level to the roof, measuring over 52 feet high and stretches across the length of the building, providing sightlines to the *Memorial of the Heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto*, situated across the plaza from the Museum. The chasm that divides the 16,000-square-foot main lobby underscores the contrast between the building's minimalist exterior and multifaceted interior program.

### **MUSEUM HISTORY & LOCATION**

The idea for the museum was first developed in 1996 by a team led by Yeshayahu Weinberg - the founding director of the Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv and director of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum from 1988 to 1994. Before his death in 2000, Weinberg created an international commission dedicated to the establishment of the Polish museum. His philosophy de-emphasized the traditional focus on the display of objects and artifacts in most museums, and instead insisted that the Museum present a narrative through interactive activities and experiential exhibitions.

The MHPJ is located in what was the heart of the Warsaw Jewish Quarter, where from the 19<sup>th</sup> century through 1939, between 70 and 90% of its inhabitants were Jewish. Beginning in 1940, the Nazis began concentrating Poland's population of over 3 million Jews into a number of extremely overcrowded ghettos in various Polish cities. The Warsaw Jewish Quarter became the Warsaw Ghetto, holding an estimated 440,000 people in a densely-populated area. Even before the Nazis began their massive deportation of Jews from the ghetto to extermination camps, thousands of Warsaw Ghetto Jews died due to rampant disease or starvation. It is also the site of the largest Jewish uprising in German-occupied Europe: the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. This month-long fight by organized members of the ghetto attempted to

prevent further deportation of ghetto residents to the concentration camps. The Nazis ended the fighting by burning the ghetto and killing or deporting any surviving Jews.

In 1998, the Warsaw City Council donated 3.2 acres (13,000 square meters) within the former Prewar Jewish Quarter and Warsaw Ghetto to the future home of the Museum. In 1999, archaeological excavations of the museum land uncovered documents buried during the war years. These documents have entered into the permanent collection of the Museum. In 1948, a monument designed by Nathan Rappaport was dedicated to the resistance fighters. This monument is located directly across the plaza from the future museum. The land between the monument and the museum will be a public park.

### **MUSEUM MISSION**

Scheduled to open in 2009, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is the world's only museum to tell a story of the Jewish people from the Middle Ages to today. Welcomed as a breath of new life in an area often mired in sadness and loss, the Museum is an educational and cultural center devoted to sharing the rich cultural heritage of Jews of Polish descent. Projected attendance estimates include over 30,000 Americans, 50,000 Israelis and hundreds of thousands of Europeans each year. For more information, the public can visit [http:// jewishmuseum.org.pl](http://jewishmuseum.org.pl)

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