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Opening of the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism

The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism opened to the public on 1 May 2015. An official ceremony for high-ranking international guests was held on 30 April. The Mayor of Munich Dieter Reiter, Federal Minister of State for Culture and the Media Professor Monika Grütters and Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer gave speeches to mark the occasion. Dr. h. c. Charlotte Knobloch, President of Munich's Jewish Community, and Romani Rose, Chair of the Central Council of German Sinti and Roma, also agreed to address the gathering. Following the speeches, Professor Dr.-Ing. Winfried Nerdinger, Founding Director of the Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism introduced the concept for the Centre as a place of education and remembrance devoted to addressing the city's Nazi past and the origins, manifestations and consequences of the Nazi dictatorship.

"The opening has been planned to coincide with the anniversary of Munich's liberation by the US army," said Mayor Dieter Reiter, explaining the choice of date. "We are especially pleased to be able to welcome to this memorable occasion Holocaust survivors and diplomatic representatives from countries with which Germany once waged war. The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism will close what for many years has been a gaping hole in Munich's culture of remembrance. This is thanks not least to the initiative of many committed citizens. The Documentation Centre is an unmistakable sign that Munich is confronting its Nazi history. Our past must strengthen our resolve to pursue democracy both now and in the future."

Federal Minister of State for Culture and the Media Professor Monika Grütters had the following to say: "Germany has a permanent moral obligation to confront the crimes of the Nazi regime, to remember its victims and to keep the memory of those crimes alive for generations to come."

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Demanding of ourselves an appropriate moral response to the darkest moments of our history should be part of our understanding of ourselves as a nation. Indeed, such a response should lay an identity-conferring foundation for the present and future. I am therefore grateful that the Free State of Bavaria and the City of Munich are addressing in such an exemplary fashion Munich's long suppressed special role as the city proclaimed by the Nazis as the "Capital of the Movement". The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism, for which the German Federal government financed one third of the construction costs, enables us to understand how a cosmopolitan city of culture managed to degenerate into a melting pot of anti-Semitic and nationalist forces and how ordinary people could become the agents of a de-humanising ideology."

Bavarian Prime Minister Horst Seehofer spoke about Bavaria's special responsibility:

"The calamitous evolution of Nazism into a mass movement and a regime of terror had its beginnings in Bavaria. This too is part of the history of our homeland. We must keep this memory alive, for the freedom and democracy that we enjoy today are inextricably linked with the unimaginable horrors of the past. At the same time, we must pass on our knowledge of this part of our history to future generations. The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism is both a place of remembrance and a place of education. Here young people can find out that a robust democracy requires democrats as citizens. In this way our memory of the past can lead us to say collectively and emphatically "Never again"!

The Munich Documentation Centre for the History of National Socialism has been built on the Brienner Strasse site once occupied by the NSDAP headquarters. The construction costs, amounting to 28.2 million euros, were shared equally by the City of Munich, the State of Bavaria and the German Federal Government. The building was designed by the Berlin architects Bettina Georg, Tobias Scheel and Simon Wetzel.

Historic Themes of Contemporary Relevance

"The crucial questions posed by the exhibition are: 'Why Munich?' and 'What does this have to do with us today?' We can only take an active stand against exclusion, racism, anti-Semitism and discrimination if we develop an awareness of the past", Director of the Department of Culture Dr. Hans Georg Küppers explains. "The exhibition and information resources conceived and put together under Professor Nerdinger's direction cover many different aspects and address a broad public of all generations and varying origins."

The permanent exhibition in German and English extending over several floors will form the centrepiece of the new Documentation Centre. But there will also be a series of special exhibitions. In addition, one entire floor will be given over to a Learning Centre where visitors can study Nazi history in greater depth. Here individuals or groups will be able to examine in more detail any of the topics covered by the exhibition at media consoles and research stations.

This area of the Documentation Centre also includes a library and adjoins the seminar area designed for educational work with school classes and other groups. A large, multi-purpose hall accommodating 200 persons will be equipped with all the technology required for lectures, talks with contemporary witnesses, films, conferences and evening events of various kinds. Free media guides in several foreign languages and covering a variety of topics will also be provided for the permanent exhibition. A Smartphone app will allow visitors to trace the places associated with Munich's Nazi past outside the Documentation Centre.

Professor Dr.-Ing. Winfried Nerdinger describes the Documentation Centre as an open and lively place: "Our varied programme offers a huge amount of content and is designed to provide visitors with comprehensive information and raise their awareness, thus encouraging them to reflect and engage in discussion. Individuals can only engage in critical reflection if they are equipped with the knowledge to do so. This enables them to develop a level of understanding that influences their own behaviour. In this respect the Documentation Centre aims to become a place where people arrive at their own convictions about the achievements of democracy. After all, history teaches us that democracy must be lived and defended on a daily basis."