

“AJC WAS THE FIRST JEWISH ORGANIZATION TO SEEK CONTACT WITH GERMANY AFTER THE HOLOCAUST, AND AJC REMAINS TODAY AN IMPORTANT PARTNER FOR GERMANY— BOTH IN TERMS OF DIALOGUE WITH AMERICAN JEWRY AND TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS IN GENERAL.”

—Angela Merkel, German Chancellor

## AJC AND GERMANY

Germany has been part of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) DNA since the leading global Jewish advocacy organization was founded in 1906, chiefly by Jews of German descent, to protect the well-being of Jews around the world.

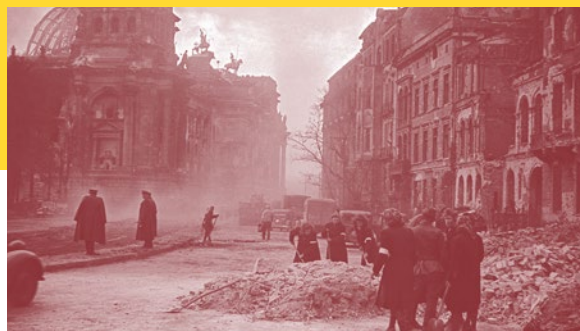
For many Americans—especially Jews, six million of whose brethren had been murdered by the Nazi regime and its accomplices—the future of Germany after 1945 was hardly high on the priority list.

AJC was the exception. Taking a long-range view, AJC understood that Germany would eventually resume its place as a major European

power. It was therefore vital, both for the cause of world freedom and for the future of the Jewish people, to ensure that Germany would reject the antisemitism of its past and adhere to the principles of democracy.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, AJC was the first American Jewish organization to embrace the renewed unification of Germany. AJC was the only international Jewish group to establish a permanent office in Berlin, in 1998.

Today, AJC remains uniquely active in working together with Germany on threats to the Jewish people, to Israel, and to democracy.



Far left: Woman holding her infant daughter at Bamberg DP camp, 1947

Left: Ruins of the Reichstag in Berlin, 1945





IN 1944,  
AJC AND  
NBC RADIO  
BROADCAST LIVE  
THE FIRST  
JEWISH SERVICE  
HELD ON  
LIBERATED  
NAZI SOIL.



## 1940s

**October 29, 1944** From the Aachen battlefield, AJC-NBC radio broadcast the first Jewish religious service from Germany since the advent of Hitler.

**1945** The Office of Advisor on Jewish Affairs, attached to the U.S. Army headquarters in Germany, is established, based on an AJC recommendation, to deal principally with the situation of Jewish displaced persons in camps in Germany. AJC member Judge Simon H. Rifkind is appointed to the post.

**1946** To promote democracy in Germany, AJC organizes and

finances the Gotthold Ephraim Lessing Association for the Promotion of Tolerance, dedicated to building a new generation of leaders in the country. "If we build up Germany materially at the present time without doing a complete spiritual and educational reorganization job, we are building up a Frankenstein monster who will infect and menace the world," says AJC Executive Vice President John Slawson.

**1946** AJC Executive Committee Member Lessing Rosenwald, former chairman of Sears, Roebuck and Company, co-founds the Citizens

Committee on Displaced Persons to campaign for admitting to the U.S. Jewish DPs in Germany.

**1948** AJC's *Make Way for Youth* film promoting tolerance and democratic values is screened by the U.S. Army occupation authorities to German youth groups, teachers, and parents. Army representatives inform AJC that the film helped gain community support for a U.S.-sponsored youth program in Germany.



AJC closely monitors the postwar situation in Germany, with frequent reports from visiting AJC staff and correspondents in Germany. AJC works on resettlement for Jewish displaced persons in the U.S. and elsewhere, and intensifies research on the sources and patterns of antisemitism and authoritarianism. Cooperating with U.S. occupation authorities, AJC focuses on education programs in Germany and the promotion of democracy.



Top: A group of women waiting on line to receive soup, circa late 1940s

Top: Kindergarten class at the Bergen Belsen DP Camp, circa 1948

Left: A young Buchenwald survivor at the Feldafing DP Camp, 1947

AJC-NBC Jewish radio broadcast from the Aachen battlefield, October 29, 1944







## AJC ENCOURAGES REFORM OF THE GERMAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND PROMOTES DEMOCRATIC EDUCATION



## 1960s

**February 1960** AJC presents recommendations on fighting antisemitism and anti-democratic influences at a meeting of the German Permanent Conference of the Ministers of Education.

**Early 1960s** AJC protests cancellation of West German arms shipments to Israel and the military work of German scientists in Egypt on missile development.

**June 1960** AJC Honorary President Jacob Blaustein meets with German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer to warn about resurgent neo-Nazism and antisemitism, after reports of over 1,000 antisemitic incidents in Germany that began with the desecration of a Cologne synagogue on December 25, 1959.

**1965** AJC's Foreign Affairs Committee meets with West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt in New York, where they discuss

German education, war-crimes trials, Holocaust restitution, and the Middle East.

**1960 to 1971** AJC sponsors the "German Educators Program," a series of annual three-week study trips by West German educators and academics to observe the teaching of democratic values in the U.S. and to study American methods of social and civic education.

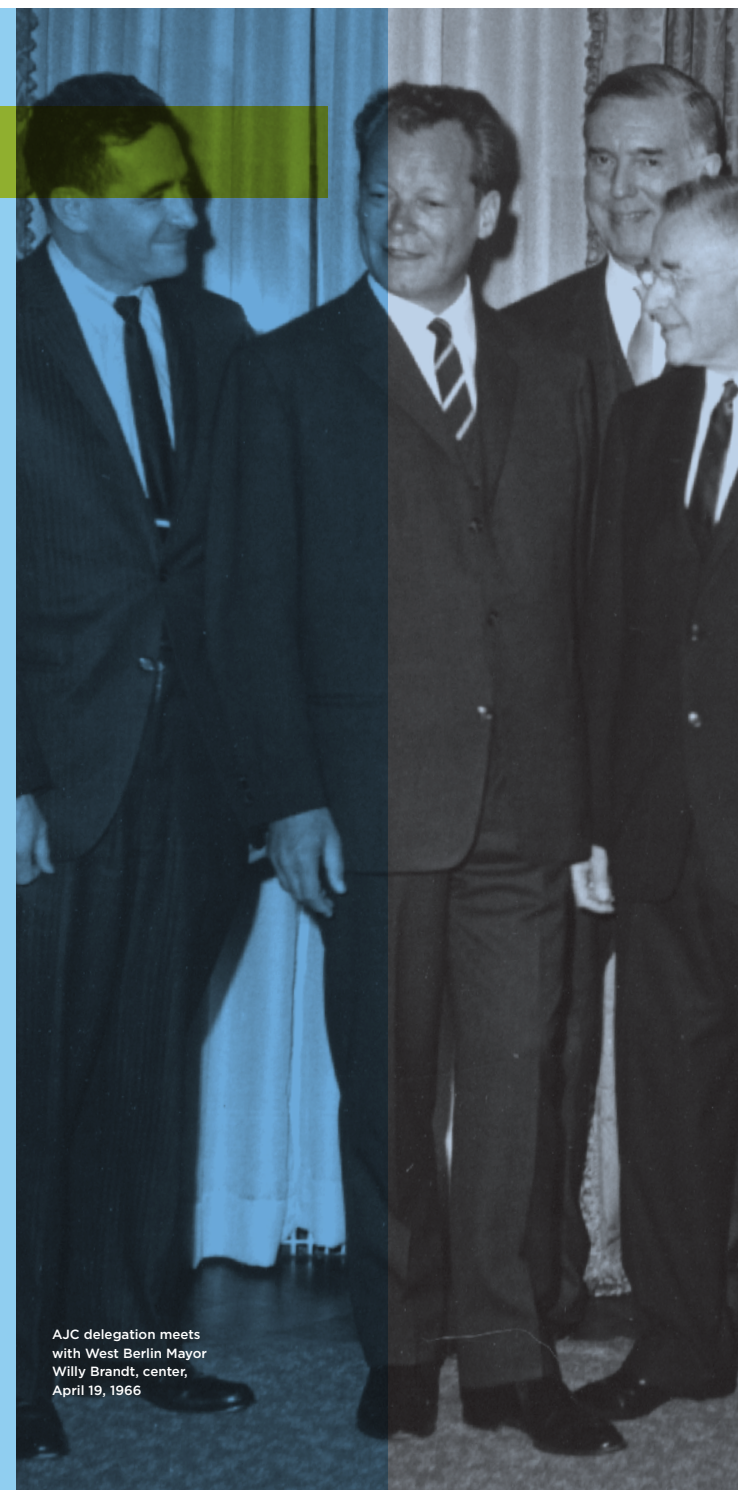
AJC steps up efforts to encourage reforms of Germany's educational system and promote democratic education, reaching out to high-level German officials and creating annual study trips to the U.S. to expose leading German educators and academics to American-style discussion forums and teaching methods. AJC lodges protests with West German politicians about policies in the Mideast threatening Israel.



Top: The Brandenburg Gate in East Berlin behind the Berlin Wall. A sign in German warns of the border between East and West Berlin, August 13, 1965

Above: John Slawson, AJC Executive Vice-President, meets with West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt, March 23, 1966

Top: German educators visit a NYC classroom to observe American methods of social and civic education for use in German school curricula, circa 1960s



AJC delegation meets with West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt, center, April 19, 1966



# NEWS FROM THE COMMITTEE

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE Institute of Human Relations, 185 E. 56 St., New York, N.Y. 10022 (212) 751-4000

The American Jewish Committee, founded in 1906, is the pioneer human-relations agency in the United States. It protects the civil and religious rights of Jews here and abroad, and advances the cause of improved human relations for all people.

MORTON YARMON, Director of Public Relations

FOR RELEASE AFTER 10:30 A.M.  
FRIDAY, JUNE 8, 1979

NEW YORK, June 8....At a meeting today with German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, a delegation of American Jewish Committee leaders welcomed the "many new and positive relationships" developing between the German people and Jews throughout the world.

Richard Maass, President of the American Jewish Committee, made these remarks to the German Chancellor as he presented him with a Chaim Gross lithograph.

"Ways must be found to reinforce and deepen those relationships," Mr. Maass said, adding: "Not only as Americans, but also as Jews, we are deeply affected by what happens in your country for in a sense all Jews living today are survivors of the Holocaust. Together we must strengthen those forces which can immunize the youth of the world against the poison of anti-Semitism and racism."

Mr. Maass recalled the speech made by the Chancellor in the Great Synagogue of Cologne last November, in which he said that "It is not for us to call upon the Jews of the world to achieve reconciliation, but we may perhaps ask them for reconciliation with us," and "Anyone desirous of reconciliation must raise his head and look the other in the eyes."

"It is in that spirit of reconciliation that we present this lithograph to you," Mr. Maass said.

Other issues raised by the group with Chancellor Schmidt were:

\*Steps to be taken by Western countries, particularly the U.S. and West Germany, to ease the current worldwide energy crisis, and the potentials for danger, both in the Middle East and elsewhere, in current OPEC country policies.

-more-

Richard Maass, President; Maxrad L. Wisker, Chairman, Board of Governors; Morton K. Wisker, Chairman, National Executive Council; Howard I. Friedman, Chairman, Board of Trustees; Bernard M. Gold, General Vice President.

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AJC Press Release,  
June 8, 1979

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AJC intensifies efforts to eliminate antisemitic stereotypes in the well-known Oberammergau Passion Play. AJC leaders work to abolish the statute of limitations regarding murders of Jews during WWII. AJC conducts intensified discussions with German officials regarding ways to strengthen bridges between the German government and the U.S. Jewish community.



Above: West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt receives a Chaim Gross lithograph presented by AJC President Richard Maass, June 8, 1979. Left to right: Helmut Schmidt, Richard Maass, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum

Top: West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt in Cologne synagogue for commemorative service on 40th anniversary of 1938 Nazi programs, November 9, 1978

AN AJC DELEGATION TO GERMANY CONVINCES CHANCELLOR HELMUT SCHMIDT TO ABOLISH THE COUNTRY'S STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS ON THE MURDER OF JEWS DURING THE NAZI PERIOD.

## 1970s

**February 1978** An AJC delegation travels to Munich, Germany, to participate in a major conference with Catholic partners on antisemitism in passion plays, and meets with organizers of the Oberammergau Passion Play to discuss changing the antisemitic script and staging, and eliminating its anti-Jewish features.

**1979** AJC President Richard Maass heads an AJC delegation to the Federal Republic of Germany that convinces Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and other government figures to abolish the country's statute of limitations on the murder of Jews during the Nazi period.



Oberammergau Passion Play performance

AJC, TOGETHER WITH  
THE KONRAD ADENAUER  
FOUNDATION, LAUNCHES  
A PATHBREAKING U.S.  
JEWISH-GERMAN EXCHANGE  
PROGRAM THAT REMAINS  
ACTIVE MORE THAN  
40 YEARS LATER.



AJC launches unique exchange programs between American Jews and Germans to introduce them to Jewish life in the U.S. and deepen commitments in Germany to fight antisemitism and strengthen democracy.



Above: AJC Statement on German Reunification, May 17, 1990

Top: Konrad Adenauer Foundation exchange group from Germany visits the U.S., 1982

Right: Fall of the Berlin Wall, 1989

## 1980s

**1980** AJC, in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, which is linked to the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), launches an annual U.S.-German exchange program that participants call "a life-changing experience." The exchange program brings American Jewish leaders to Germany and German young professionals to the U.S. to learn about contemporary politics and Jewish life.

**1983** AJC begins exchanges and transatlantic programs

in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, linked to Social Democratic Party.

**1983** AJC is first American Jewish group to visit the East German Berlin Jewish community. AJC later sends prayer books and arranges for the first visiting rabbi to lead High Holy Day services there.

**1985** AJC intervenes to ease a serious strain in German-American Jewish relations raised by the projected visit of Chancellor Helmut Kohl

and President Ronald Reagan to the Bitburg military cemetery, where SS officers are buried.

**1987** AJC and the prestigious transatlantic organization Atlantik Bruecke (Atlantic Bridge) launch a decade of cooperation on a highly-regarded series of conferences exploring German and Jewish attitudes toward one another in post-WWII Germany.



American Rabbi Ernst Lorge leads High Holy Day services in East Berlin, 1986







Two East German border guards talk to a West German policeman through a hole in the Berlin Wall, February 1990



Top Right: Berlin Mayor Eberhard Diepgen meets with AJC President Alfred Moses, February 4, 1992



AJC is the first global Jewish organization to advocate for German unification after the fall of the Berlin Wall, while also cautioning about the need to fully integrate eastern Germany into a united, democratic Germany. AJC launches a special partnership with the German military. After decades of engagement and activity with Germany, AJC opens an office in Berlin, the first American Jewish organization to demonstrate its enduring commitment to German-Jewish relations by establishing a permanent presence in Germany.



Germans celebrating New Year's Eve sit atop the Berlin Wall over graffiti reading Prosit 1990! ("Here's to 1990!"). On October 3, 1990, the formal reunification of Germany took effect

THE FIRST SYSTEMATIC STUDY CONDUCTED IN A UNIFIED GERMANY ON ISSUES OF JEWISH CONCERN REVEALED SURPRISING AND DISTURBING FINDINGS...

## 1990s

**May 7, 1990** A "Statement on German Unity" passed at AJC's annual meeting declares that "democracy and human dignity are the winners; fear, repression and control economies are the losers." As conditions for unification, the statement lists education about the Holocaust, Jewish life and history; settlement of Holocaust survivor claims in East Germany; the end of East German support for terrorist groups attacking Israel; a unified German commitment to democracy and Holocaust memory; and a pledge to remain in NATO and promote European unification.

**1992** AJC initiates with the Friedrich Naumann Foundation an annual study program that promotes democratic thinking among young leaders of emerging Central and East European democracies.

**1994** AJC partners with the Bundeswehr (Germany's military) to host regular visits by German military officers to AJC headquarters in New York, hold AJC

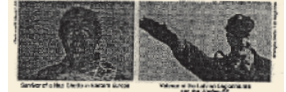
lectures at German military academies, and conduct study programs on Jewish life and annual missions to Israel for German officers, run by AJC Berlin and AJC Jerusalem.

**1994** AJC publishes *German Attitudes Toward Jews and Other Minorities*, showing that more than one in five Germans harbor negative attitudes toward Jews and nearly a third believe Jews exert too much influence on world events. While factual knowledge of the Holocaust is high, a third of Germans show little interest in maintaining its memory. It was the second study AJC commissioned from the Emnid Institute.

**1994** AJC's Executive Committee endorses Germany's candidacy for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

**1998** After an extensive diplomatic and media campaign AJC secures Germany's agreement to compensate Holocaust survivors living in East Europe.

## Guess Which One Receives a War Victims Pension from the German Government.



**IF YOU GUESSED THE ANSWER, YOU'RE RIGHT.** The German government has agreed to pay a pension to Holocaust survivors who were in the German military during World War II. The pension is \$1,500-\$2,000 a year, depending on the survivor's age and the amount of time spent in the military. The pension is not a reward for military service, but a recognition of the suffering and sacrifice of these men. The German government has agreed to pay this pension to all surviving soldiers who were in the German military during World War II. The pension is not a reward for military service, but a recognition of the suffering and sacrifice of these men. The German government has agreed to pay this pension to all surviving soldiers who were in the German military during World War II.

**1998** After decades of engagement with Germany, AJC becomes the first American Jewish organization to demonstrate its enduring commitment to German Jewish relations by establishing a permanent office in Berlin.

**1999** AJC releases a comprehensive list of more than 250 German companies that used slave or forced labor during World War II.

**1999** AJC donates medical supplies to Kosovo refugees, forced to flee by Serbia, living in camp facilities in Macedonia administered by the Johanniter, a German Protestant relief organization. The supplies are flown to Macedonia by the Bundeswehr, in a poignant symbol of German-AJC cooperation to aid Muslim refugees.

Top: AJC Advertisement in *The New York Times*, May 7, 1997





"THIS SPECIAL TRUST  
IN A DEMOCRATIC GERMANY,  
EXPRESSED IN YOUR  
INVITATION TO ME  
TONIGHT, FILLS ME WITH  
PROFOUND GRATITUDE."

—Chancellor Angela Merkel,  
AJC Centennial Gala,  
May 2006, Washington, D.C.

## 2000s

**May 2000** German President Johannes Rau, on his first visit to the U.S. since his inauguration, addresses the AJC Global Forum in Washington, D.C., where he is joined by U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson. "It is no coincidence that I am giving my first speech in the United States as Federal President before the American Jewish Committee. For over fifty years, AJC has been among the avant-garde when it comes to American-German relations," says President Rau.

**2001** German Federal Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, addressing AJC's Global Forum in Washington, D.C., praises the organization for its decades-long investment in Germany and in the transatlantic partnership. "The AJC has been investing in the transatlantic partnership for decades in an exemplary way. Indeed, the new Berlin office has, for ever more American Jews, become a bridge of understanding with the Germany of today," says Fischer.

**2001** During a visit to Germany by AJC President Harold Tanner and CEO David Harris, AJC Berlin initiates the first in a series of Turkish-Jewish roundtables, with prominent representatives from both communities living in Germany.

**2002** AJC Berlin commissions the first major study to evaluate daily newspaper coverage of Israel in Germany. The study, by the Duisberger Institute for Language and Social Research (DISS), "Mideast Coverage of the Second Intifada in the German Print Media, with Particular Attention to the Image of Israel," concludes that the image of Israel in the German press is often negative, replete with oversimplifications and antisemitic stereotypes.

**2002** After a significant rise in antisemitism in German schools, AJC Berlin co-founds the *Task Force: Education on Antisemitism*. It has become the leading professional forum in Germany for educational experts and practitioners dealing with pedagogical approaches to antisemitism, Holocaust education, and issues regarding Israel and the Mideast.

**November 2004** AJC CEO David Harris receives the Golden Cross, the German military's highest honor, in Berlin. "The Bundeswehr sees the AJC as an important enrichment for our officers. We would not want to be without the partnership," says Defense Minister Peter Struck, who presents the award at a ceremony marking the 10th anniversary of the special relationship between AJC and the German Armed Forces.

**2005** AJC persuades German officials to include an educational pavilion with the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in the center of Berlin, which was inaugurated in 2005. Without it, AJC argued, visitors would be left without historical detail about the Holocaust.

Top Left: L-R: Lawrence Ramer, Associate Chair of AJC's Board of Trustees, with German President Johannes Rau at AJC Global Forum, 2000

**May 2006** German Chancellor Angela Merkel addresses the AJC Centennial Gala Dinner in Washington, D.C., together with President George W. Bush and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. "This special trust in a democratic Germany, expressed in your invitation to me tonight—as the German Chancellor—fills me with profound gratitude," says Chancellor Merkel.

**March 2008** Charlotte Knobloch, a Holocaust survivor and the then president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, becomes the first recipient of the AJC Sidney Lefkowitz Award for International Jewish Renewal, in recognition of her tireless efforts to revive Jewish life in Germany after the Holocaust. In addition, Michael Blumenthal, Founding Director of the Berlin Jewish Museum, and a German-born survivor and former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, receives the AJC Ernst Cramer Award for Outstanding Transatlantic Achievement.



AJC Berlin expands its network of contacts and partners in Germany. It launches new initiatives to promote democratic education, and to memorialize the Holocaust. AJC intensifies outreach efforts to the German Turkish community. AJC exposes one-sided reporting of Israel in the German print media and establishes an important forum for educators addressing issues of antisemitism.



Above: AJC seminar for police officers from 15 European countries on hate crimes prevention

Top: AJC CEO David Harris receives the Golden Cross, German military's highest honor, November 2004



Rabbi Menachem HaCohen, chief rabbi of Romania, holds a Torah scroll AJC donated to a new community in Schwerin in eastern Germany, during the gala dinner at the Jewish Museum celebrating AJC Berlin's tenth anniversary, March 12, 2008.





AJC's Light Unto the Nations Award presented to Angela Merkel, Federal Chancellor of Germany by AJC CEO David Harris, January 20, 2012



AJC broadens its exchange programs with Germany for a younger generation of AJC leaders and young German professionals. AJC Berlin launches a pathbreaking model project to create memorial sites at five Holocaust mass graves in western Ukraine, an initiative later continued by the German government. The office undertakes numerous initiatives to promote positive perspectives on Israel, including numerous missions to Israel and the 50/50 conference series examining German-Israeli relations. The office releases pathbreaking studies that illuminate complex problems of antisemitism within some Muslim circles, while continuing outreach to various groups within the Muslim community.

Top: Announcement of "Hands for Kids" curriculum's expansion into all 400 elementary schools in Berlin, April 2013

Top Right: AJC Delegation with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier, center, April 2017

AJC CEO DAVID HARRIS LEADS AN AJC DELEGATION TO BERLIN TO BESTOW THE "LIGHT UNTO THE NATIONS" AWARD, AJC'S HIGHEST DIPLOMATIC HONOR, UPON GERMAN CHANCELLOR ANGELA MERKEL.



## 2010s

**2010** AJC and Allianz create the "Third Generation Alliance" exchange program for young managers at Allianz and AJC young professionals from across the U.S. They explore together the past and the present during a ten-day joint study trip to Berlin in partnership with Germany Close Up.

**2010** The AJC-Konrad Adenauer Exchange program celebrates 30th anniversary. The program has produced hundreds of ambassadors for German-Jewish relations on both sides of the Atlantic. It is the longest-running collaborative project between a German political foundation and an American Jewish organization. "This program was one of many elements intended to further consolidate German democracy, which is founded on human rights and committed to protecting freedom," says Chancellor Angela Merkel.

**2010** 20 years after German unification, AJC Berlin, in cooperation with the Berlin state government, launches "Hands for Kids," the first democracy-building curriculum for elementary

school pupils, based on AJC's successful "Hands Across the Campus" in the U.S. and Germany. The Berlin/Brandenburg State Institute for Education and Media, the German Society for Democratic Education, and the RAA educational network help in compiling the curriculum.

**2011** AJC CEO David Harris leads an AJC delegation to Berlin to bestow the "Light Unto the Nations" award, AJC's highest diplomatic honor, upon German Chancellor Angela Merkel.

**2011** AJC partners with Germany Close Up, a German government-funded program, to bring young American Jews to Germany. Eventually, more than 200 AJC ACCESS young professionals, AJC Goldman fellows, and student leaders participate in the ongoing programs.

**2012** AJC Berlin helps defeat a parliamentary resolution to outlaw circumcision in Germany by producing a landmark report for decision-makers and government officials that exposes the fraudulent claims of circumcision opponents. Chancellor Merkel cites the AJC study in expressing her opposition to the resolution.

**2014-15** AJC Berlin convenes "50/50—The Next 50 Years: A Transatlantic Dialogue Project," a series of three conferences in Berlin and Tel Aviv on the German-Israeli relationship, marking 50 years of German-Israeli relations. This initiative earned AJC Berlin a special award from the Israeli Embassy as the leading NGO working on German-Israeli relations.

**2015** AJC Berlin launches a pathbreaking pilot project to create memorial sites at five Holocaust mass graves in western Ukraine, an initiative funded by the German government.

**2016** AJC Berlin obtains the signatures of 85 mayors of German cities for AJC's "Mayors United Against Antisemitism" campaign, a ten-point action plan to combat antisemitism signed by more than 500 American and European mayors.

**April 2018** AJC Berlin launches "3i: German and French Perspectives on Immigration, Integration, and Identity," an AJC Europe initiative looking at similarities and differences between France and Germany in dealing with immigrants, and examining ways to address the preservation

of national identities along with democratic values in Europe. The second part of the conference takes place in Paris that December.

**2018** AJC Berlin marks the 20th anniversary of its opening. A delegation of 50 AJC leaders from across the U.S. participate in the three-day program, highlighted by an hour-long meeting with Chancellor Merkel. Josef Schuster, president of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, becomes the second recipient of AJC's Sidney Lefkowitz Award for International Jewish Renewal, and Cem Ozdemir, a member of parliament from the Green/Alliance 90 Party, receives the AJC Ramer Award for Courage in the Defense of Democracy.

**2020** AJC planned to mark 75 years since the end of WWII and its unique record of engagement with Germany by convening its annual Global Forum in Germany, the first time in its 114-year history that it has held this signature event in Europe. It was cancelled due to the pandemic.

# BUILDING A NEW ERA



"It is up to us whether we allow ourselves to be prisoners of our history or architects of our history," says AJC CEO David Harris. That axiom has underscored the pathbreaking relationship between the leading global Jewish advocacy organization and the Federal Republic of Germany.

We celebrate the profound achievements, but their durability should not be taken for granted. AJC, through its pioneering Berlin office, is poised to continue to be the advocate for addressing the new challenges, including the reemergence of neo-Nazi and other hate groups, the task of successfully absorbing immigrants, many of them Muslims, in German society, and rising antisemitism.

The partnerships AJC has established with the highest levels of government, with political

foundations, with the military, and with civil society reinforce the shared commitment to German democracy, one that will ensure a vibrant Jewish life in Germany, protection of all minorities, a close relationship with American Jews and with Israel, and with the U.S., as a cornerstone of the transatlantic partnership.

Much has changed for the Jewish people, for Germany, and for the relationship between them over the past 75 years, an ongoing process in which AJC has been a major, forward-looking actor.

Convening the 2020 AJC Global Forum in Berlin was intended to be a significant milestone, but, even with its regrettable but necessary cancellation, the essential work of building a new era in AJC-Germany relations will continue.

"PERHAPS NO OTHER ISSUE BETTER CAPTURES AJC'S UNIQUELY FORWARD-LOOKING, RESULTS-ORIENTED APPROACH THAN OUR POSTWAR ENGAGEMENT WITH GERMANY. THE PATHWAY HAS BEEN ENORMOUSLY DIFFICULT, BUT WE'VE PERSEVERED. THE RESULTS SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES."

—AJC CEO David Harris



As a tribute to the victims of a recent terrorist attack in Jerusalem, the Israeli flag was projected onto Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, January 9, 2017