

JDC Dedicates Memorial Commemorating Heroic Fallen Staff

Jerusalem, June 15, 2009 – The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) dedicated an interactive memorial wall commemorating more than forty JDC employees, from 1920 until today, who fell in the course of their missions assisting and rescuing Jews around the globe. The memorial was presented and conceived by JDC’s CEO Steven Schwager.

“The JDC employees commemorated on the wall sacrificed their lives while putting into practice the saying that we often repeat at JDC – that he who saves one life is as though he saved an entire world. Even today, JDC staff continue this sacred mission of assisting and caring for Jews around the world, wherever they live,” said Schwager during the dedication ceremony at JDC’s office in Jerusalem.

The memorial consists of an interactive exhibit screen on which the names of the fallen and the dates of their deaths are inscribed. The display enables visitors to read about their life stories and activities on behalf of JDC. The memorial was assembled following extensive research from JDC’s Archives in New York and Jerusalem. To date, details have been gathered on 43 of these JDC employees.

At the ceremony, Hebrew University professor Israel Agranat spoke of his grandfather Professor Israel Friedlander. Friedlander, a JDC employee, was killed, along with Rabbi Bernard Cantor, in Ukraine in 1920 while assisting the Jews of Eastern Europe. JDC arranged for their burial at the time. In 1999, JDC dispatched staff members to locate their gravesites to ensure they were being properly maintained.

The cemetery where Friedlander was buried had been destroyed and trees planted over it during the Soviet regime. After searching for several hours through the forest to no avail, one of the searchers tripped and fell to the ground. Having realized he tripped on a tombstone. Beneath the dirt he brushed off the stone was an inscription of Israel Friedlander’s name. At the request of Friedlander’s family, JDC helped move the body to Israel for burial.

Among the dozens of other JDC employees the memorial exhibit focuses on, it tells the stories of Emanuel Ringleblum and Charles Jordan.

Ringelblum (1900-1944) was head of the JDC office in Warsaw. Ringelblum joined the JDC in Warsaw in 1930 and was sent to head the JDC team that distributed emergency aid in Zbaszyn, where thousands of Polish Jews had gathered after being expelled from Germany. Ringelblum supervised the house committees – which provided food, medicine, educational and cultural activities and soup kitchens – in the Warsaw Ghetto.

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Ringelblum and his family were arrested by the Germans in 1944, as they hid on the Aryan side of Warsaw. They were taken to prison and executed.

Jordan (1908-1967) was a Vice-President and CEO of JDC and was killed in Prague in 1967 in circumstances that still remain unexplained. Jordan began his work with the JDC in 1941 as head of JDC activities in the Caribbean, where he aided Jewish refugees who had fled to Cuba from Nazi Germany. After World War II, he worked in China and the Far East assisting Jewish refugees. Jordan was honored by the French, Norwegian, and Belgian governments as well as by numerous non-governmental organizations for his work with refugees. One year after his death, a committee headed by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees awarded Jordan the Nansen Medal, which Jordan had called during his lifetime "the Nobel Prize for refugee work."

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Since 1914, JDC has given global expression to the principle that all Jews are responsible for one another. Working today in over 70 countries, JDC acts on behalf of North America's Jewish communities and others to rescue Jews in danger, provide relief to those in distress, revitalize overseas Jewish communities and help Israel overcome the social challenges of its most vulnerable citizens. JDC also provides non-sectarian emergency relief and long-term development assistance worldwide. For more information, please visit www.JDC.org.