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Hungarian Synagogue reopens for the first time since its destruction by the Nazis

On this occasion, World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban met to discuss antisemitism and the revitalization of Jewish life in Hungary.

By YOSSI LEMPKOWICZ

EJP (14.06.2021) - <https://bit.ly/3vHC5Ip> - World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder joined Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban last Thursday for a reopening ceremony of Rumbach Street Synagogue in Budapest. The synagogue reopened for the first time following its destruction by the Nazis during the Holocaust.

World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban met to discuss antisemitism and the revitalization of Jewish life in Hungary

Nestled in what used to be the Jewish ghetto in Budapest, the Rumbach Street Synagogue will reopen for public education and use, many decades after the historic building was destroyed by the Nazis during their occupation of Hungary in the 1940's.

Lauder [joined MAZSIHISZ](#), the Federation of Hungarian Jewish Communities and the Hungarian affiliate of the WJC, to celebrate the reopening of the synagogue, originally built in 1872 to serve Hungarian Jews in the eastern part of Budapest.

The celebration came immediately before a meeting between Amb. Lauder and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, during which Lauder personally thanked Orban for the Hungarian government's financial support of the renovation and restoration of the synagogue building. The building is also the new home of the WJC's Hungary office.

"Without this synagogue, I would not be here," Lauder said. "My grandparents moved to Budapest to get married and had their wedding in the very space we are currently celebrating. They eventually moved to Vienna, and then to New York as antisemitism grew throughout Hungary. And if they did not make that move, I wouldn't be here today, let alone part of this historic celebration commemorating a very positive step forward for Hungary's Jewish community."

Lauder displayed a stone that was part of the original Rumbach synagogue, which he has carried throughout his travels as WJC president. It was passed down by his grandparents

to his mother, and then to him. He shared how that stone has represented a symbol of good luck as the WJC works to combat the rise in antisemitism around the world.

The synagogue building's renovation was made possible thanks to a 3.2 billion Hungarian forint (10-11 million USD) grant from the Hungarian government, disbursed through a series of payments to recognize the fact that more than half of the Hungarian Jewish community, representing nearly 450,000 people, were murdered in the Holocaust. Due to the decimation of Hungary's Jewish population, the congregation and its physical space were never fully restored after World War II. Now complete, the modern-era renovation will help support and revitalize the [largest Jewish population in East Central Europe](#).

During his meeting with Prime Minister Orban, Lauder praised the government's support for the Jewish community, particularly amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as its support to health, social and cultural institutions that improve the quality of life for Hungarian Jewry.

Lauder also thanked Prime Minister Orban for his recent visit to Israel and his ongoing support for the Jewish state on the international floor.

The reopening celebration also included a commemorative march around the Jewish neighborhood as community members danced with Torah scrolls, and a religious ceremony to place the Torah scrolls back in the ark and light the eternal candles. The chief rabbi of Hungary, Robert Frölich, and Israeli Ambassador to Hungary, Yacov Hadas-Handelsman, also participated in today's gathering.

The synagogue building will now serve as an open synagogue, welcoming those representing all branches of Judaism with a moveable Bimah. The space will also host concerts and other events, serving as a space to educate all visitors about Jewish life.

Photo : World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder speaks in the Rumbach Street Synagogue in Budapest. Picture by the WJC.

The situation of persecuted Christians and the Hungarian help in 2020

By Tristan Azbej, State Secretary of the Prime Minister's Office for the Aid of Persecuted Christians and for the Hungary Helps Program

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HRWF (26.04.2021) - *Human Rights Without Frontiers* is re-publishing a part of this 10-page article which is one of the contributions to the Budapest Report on Christian Persecution 2020. The full article can be read [here](#), pp 17-27.

Hungary's achievements in 2020

Since its establishment in 2016, the State Secretariat of the Prime Minister's Office for the Aid of Persecuted Christians and the Implementation of the Hungary Helps Program has distributed 13.4 billion HUF (about 43 million USD) for various projects which supported local communities in 21 countries. These funds helped at least 100,000 people to either stay in their homeland or to return there.

A Scholarship Program for Christian Youth was established to enable persecuted and discriminated

Christian youth, who are often excluded from higher education in their home countries, to study in Hungarian colleges and universities and then use the skills they learned in Hungary at home. Young scholars from three continents are eligible for this scholarship which is awarded in collaboration with several church partners.

Projects implemented with Hungarian funding have directly contributed to the improvement of 13 out of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals and have been selected according to the humanitarian principles as defined by OCHA (humanity, neutrality, impartiality, independence). In 2020, Hungary continued to work internationally for joint action because too much political correctness can often hide the true extent of the suffering of Christian communities. Thus, the Government of Hungary responded actively to meet Christians' urgent requests for help and provide real assistance to local communities.

An example of Hungary's active solidarity is the reconstruction of the Iraqi Christian settlement of Tell Askuf, where St George's Church, five schools, a local kindergarten and nearly 1,000 demolished or damaged residential properties were rebuilt between 2017 and 2018.

In 2020, several further projects were launched or implemented in aid of persecuted Christians around the world, following the rationale of the Hungarian model.

The Hungarian Government intends to respond to the multifaceted challenges of the growing persecution of Christians in Africa by supporting similarly complex projects. In 2020, in Kenya we launched four different support plans that exemplify Hungary's diverse approaches to assistance. Project proposals prepared by the Archdiocese of Nyer include the establishment of a youth centre, the development of the educational infrastructure of St Paul Seminary, the construction of a new annexe to an existing dormitory, and the development of the existing infrastructure in King Christ Seminary. A project proposal from Tangaza Catholic University wants to develop peace building training in the border counties of Kenya through interfaith dialogue. Projects designed by the St Joseph the Worker Catholic Church in Nairobi include several sub-tasks like setting up a shelter in Westlands County for survivors of gender-based violence, providing academic and vocational scholarships and assist 209 women and girls in urban farming. Finally, the Northern Rangelands Trust (NRT) projects support the establishment of basic health care facilities in the Biliqo Bulesa nature reserve and a few other infrastructure development activities.

The coronavirus situation has pushed hundreds of fragile communities to the brink of starvation, including thousands of Christian families. In response to an urgent request,

the Hungarian Government provide emergency assistance to the suffering Armenian Apostolic and other Christian communities in Lebanon and Pakistan. The Hungarian Government also provided 1 million Euros as emergency funding to the Maronite Catholic Church in Lebanon in the aftermath of the Beirut port explosion, so that they can save lives, carry out relief efforts and rebuild the damaged infrastructure. This donation reached Lebanon within two days.

The pandemic has led to mass job losses in Palestine and Jordan. As a result, 12,456 students in 38 schools operated by the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem are unable to pay their tuition fees, which creates such a huge deficit in the budget of these schools that it threatens the future of the affected institutions. The total financial loss amounts to more than 7 million USD. Urgent action is needed to save these schools, which will support the survival of local Christian communities as well.

In March 2020, illegal immigrants on Lesbos damaged several chapels, including the local church of St George. As the Greek community in Hungary maintains close ties with the motherland, the National Council of Greeks in Hungary and the Parliamentary Advocate of the Greek Minority asked the Hungarian Government for a 10 million HUF contribution donation for the restoration of these churches. By supporting this project, the Hungarian Government contributed to the preservation of universal Christian culture and values. Hungarian support also enabled the implementation of other projects throughout the year. For example, Hungarian donations enabled the successful completion of the construction of the "The First Miracle of the Lord" School Centre in Kana, Galilee. The State Secretariat also assisted the activities of the Roads of Success, an organisation that collects and processes evidence of genocide perpetrated by the Islamic State.

Finally, Hungary supported the efforts of the Archdiocese of Dhakka to build housing for indigenous Adivasi Christian families.

Budapest report on Christian persecution 2020

HRWF (26.04.2021) - The Budapest Report on Christian Persecution 2020 (437 pages) has just been published this month and is available in Hungarian and English. [You can read it here.](#)

The numerous contributions to this report present the persecution of Christians in different regions of the world from the point of view of security policy, history, fundamental rights, and public law, among others. The studies of this new volume are organized into three main themes. In addition to the regional presentation of acts of violence against Christian communities, the volume also deals with the phenomenon and its international legal aspects in a general, theoretical context, as well as the role of state and church organizations in solving the problem.

You can also watch the roundtable discussions in Hungarian (sub-titles in English) about the new volume [here.](#)

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