

February, 2014

**Humanistic Center in Rybnik, Upper Silesia, Poland**  
**International Humanistic Educational Center for**  
**Tolerance and International Brotherhood**

A proposal by Dr. Eli Manneberg

Globalization after WW II has brought a lot of success through the expansion of international relations and enhanced economic, political and social interests. Unfortunately it did not solve many basic human problems such as the oppression of the weak, and maybe it even increased those problems. At the same time, we see a rise of terrible violence and terrorism that is threatening to flood the world. In recent years we have witnessed the increase of hatred towards the "Other", the different, based on primeval anxiety, racial values and the denial of basic human rights, fueled by incitement and ignorance. These problems are shared by all countries and societies in one way or another, and as educators we are troubled by this trend of deterioration in the basic values of liberalism, of racism getting stronger and of deterioration in the status of democracy as a way of life and world-view. In order to cope with these phenomena we suggest a program of values-oriented study of history. We believe that studying the past in a social and ethical context enables a meaningful understanding of the past and can assist in creating a humanistic world view.

The historical framework is the Holocaust, analyzed as a continuous process starting from the rise of the Nazis to power and climaxing in the "Final Solution" – the systematic extermination of the Jewish people.

The moral framework is humanism and democracy. Humanism places man, as a rational-moral entity, in the center of social existence. Democracy places the commitment to human rights at the top of the social values hierarchy. We believe that the Holocaust became possible when these two pillars of modern civilization collapsed.

The pedagogic approach encourages an open dialogue in three circles:

The Inner Circle – each one of the participants with himself when encountering new information;

The Group Circle – where everyone is invited to express his/her independent, personal opinion;

The Inter-Group Circle – where one can express both personal and group identity.

This is, in a nutshell, the humanistic dialogue we seek to promote in the program. We believe that teaching history within the perspective of values and combining the principle of humanism with everyday practice is the way to sharpen our moral awareness, because our existence as a democratic society depends on that awareness.

To that purpose we suggest the establishment of a "Humanistic Center" in the town of Rybnik, Upper Silesia, Poland. This center will operate in the spirit that guides the educational activity of the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, USA, and the educational format of the Humanistic Center in the Ghetto Fighters' Museum, Kibbutz Lochamei Hagetaot, Israel, that has been operating successfully since its establishment in 1995.





## BEIT LOHAMEI HAGHETAOT

GHETTO FIGHTERS' HOUSE MUSEUM

### Why Rybnik?

Rybnik is a vibrant, cultural and modern city of 138,000 inhabitants in Upper Silesia, Southern Poland. It is located on a historical, cultural and geographic crossroad in modern Poland, with historical ties to Germany, the Habsburg Empire, the Czech Republic, Austria and the Russian Empire. Rybnik offers easy access to historical sites such as **Katowice** – an important city in modern Polish Silesian history, and where the first Congress of Hovevei Zion was assembled (50 km); **Sosnowiec** and **Bedzin** – large centers of Polish Jewry before WW II, locations of two major Ghettos and a center of Jewish underground activity (60 km); **Auschwitz-Birkenau** – the largest extermination site (85 km). Towards the end of the Second World War, as the extermination camps were being liquidated, the famous death marches took place. One of them, beginning in Auschwitz-Birkenau, passed through Rybnik, and there is a large mass grave in Rybnik today; **Krakow** – the historical-cultural capital of Poland (150 km); **Wroclaw** – an important center in the formation of modern Judaism (190 km).

Rybnik is a green modern city with many parks, sport facilities and cultural establishments, it has a central library with more than 20 branches around the city, and it has a music school, a cultural center and a theater. In the old quarter of the city, next to the old market square, there is a museum with exhibitions of the city and its vicinity, the Silesian culture and traditional handcrafts. A significant space is dedicated to the typical Silesian mining industry and life style, and close to the city there is a mine that was converted into a museum. In the city museum there is an archive that contains documents dating back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Raciborz, a nearby town, there is a regional archive of documents from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In Rybnik there are branches of universities, it has shopping centers, hotels and restaurants. In two years' time Rybnik plans to have a new hotel which will accommodate large tourist groups. The city is well connected to the rest of Poland in a grid of roads, and the new motorway to Wroclaw and Krakow is about 5 km from Rybnik. In nearby Katowice is the Pyrzowice International Airport and international railway station. In Krakow (about 1½ hours away by car) is the Balice International Airport. Rybnik has 13 twin-city cooperative agreements.

### "The Manneberg House"

At 15 Jan Sobieski St. in Rybnik, near the Old City Square and the local museum, there is a large old building. The building is privately owned and the various rooms it contains are rented to different shops, offices and clubs. In 1900 this building was owned by Josef Manneberg, a wealthy merchant whose father, Leopold (Loebel) Manneberg, was one of the leaders of the Jewish community of Rybnik and the headmaster of the Jewish school. In 1901 Leopold was given an award commemorating 25 years of service to the Jewish community (the event was published in the German-Jewish press in *Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums*). Leopold passed away in 1910 in Rybnik and his son Josef (born in Rybnik in 1874) became a Polish citizen after the referendum in 1921. In 1939 Josef sold in a hurry all his assets in Rybnik, including the building at 15 Jan Sobieski St., and immigrated with his immediate family to Palestine, thus saving himself and his family. Most of his extended family was murdered in the Holocaust, but some family members survived and their descendants live today in Israel, USA, Australia, England, Switzerland, Germany and Brazil.





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The "Manneberg House" is appropriate to be the site of the "Humanistic Center" due to its symbolic Jewish and Educational connection to the history of Rybnik, and because of its size and location in the tourist center of Rybnik.

### **General program**

The Humanistic Center will be in the Manneberg House in Silesia. The Center will include the following functions:

- A room dedicated to the memory of Silesian Jewry;
- A study room that will enable research using books, photos, collections of archived material about the Rybnik Jewish community and computers connected to the internet;
- Meeting rooms for group workshops and discussions;
- A small and modest hostel for groups from outside Poland, that will include a small Vegetarian restaurant;
- The Humanistic Center will function as a place of study, a place for groups to meet, a starting point for excursions in the area and an administrative center facilitating pedagogic planning and operation of educational programs.

### **Objectives of the program**

- The purpose is to teach the history of Silesia and southern Poland on the one hand, and to encourage students to become acquainted with the life of modern Poland on the other hand;
- The center will nurture Humanistic values, tolerance and brotherhood among nations, in the spirit of the basic values of liberal democracy;
- The center will commemorate the world that no longer exists and draw educational conclusions from the Holocaust;
- The center will enable study of the Holocaust, its racial, anti-Semitic, fascist and Nazi roots, with the purpose of avoiding its recurrence;
- The center will advance the study and research of Silesian Jewry as part of the study of the history of Israel, Poland and Germany, including genealogical studies to reveal the roots of families and local traditions.

### **Target group**

Educators, teachers, schoolmasters, youth exchange group leaders, high school students, university students, scholars, public and community representatives and interested private people.





## **Schedule and implementation phases**

### **Phase I – Preparation. Time required – one year.**

1. Establishing working relations with museums and institutions: Ghetto Fighters' Museum and the Humanistic Center, Israel; Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel; Holocaust Museum, Washington DC, USA, and the educational programs staff; Rybnik Museum; Jewish Museum in Warsaw, Poland; Galicia Museum, Krakow, Poland; Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial site, Poland and other relevant organizations.
2. Establishing working relations with philanthropic organizations such as the Katowice Jewish community, the Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Poland and others.
3. Creating relations with educational organizations in the Rybnik area, presenting the idea and exploring ways to cooperate with schools, teachers, educators and interested members of the public.
4. Establishing working relations with municipal and community authorities – the Rybnik municipality and the management of the Rybnik Museum.
5. Exploring the feasibility of using and/or purchasing the entire building at 15 Jan Sobieski St. or parts of it.

### **Phase II – preparing working plans. Time required – two years.**

1. Finding funding sources.
2. Establishing an NPO or Foundation that will create, organize and operate the Rybnik Humanistic Center.
3. Recruiting legal, financial, organizational, architectural and other professionals who will accompany the project.
4. Purchasing or renting the building at 15 Jan Sobieski St.
5. Preparing the architectural plan for the building, taking into account the required functions on the one hand and historical preservation on the other hand.

### **Phase III – creating operational programs for the center. Time required – two years.**

1. Preparing educational programs.
2. Operating pilot programs and having them evaluated by an external organization.
3. Implementing the reconstruction of the building in accordance with the possibilities.
4. Purchasing equipment, furniture, etc.
5. Formal opening of the Rybnik Humanistic Center in "The Manneberg House".

## **Notes and recommendations**

1. Some of the different phases of implementation can and should be done simultaneously. For example, it is possible to operate educational programs in the pilot phase before the official opening of the center.
2. The ownership of the building on 15 Jan Sobieski St. should be given to the Rybnik Municipality, and in return the municipality will be obligated to take upon itself part of the reconstruction and operational costs of the Humanistic Center.
3. The current businesses that rent spaces in the building will be able to stay in it as much as possible. The rent payments will be used to cover the costs of operating the Center.





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4. The day-to-day operation will be conducted by the NPO. The NPO's management will include representatives of the Rybnik Municipality, the Katowice Jewish community, representatives of Jewish organizations in Poland, and the Humanistic Center of the Ghetto Fighters' Museum in Israel. The management of the NPO will receive continuous reports according to a schedule that will be agreed upon in advance.
5. It is important to state that none of the Manneberg descendants have any claims on the property at 15 Jan Sobieski St.

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