

German Ambassador reception – Andrew remarks, 20 December 2011

Your Excellency, Honoured Guests and Friends, it gives me great pleasure on behalf of everyone at the AJR to thank you, Ambassador Boomgaarden, for your kind invitation to host this wonderful reception in our honour, and for joining with us to celebrate the AJR's 70th anniversary.

Even by our standards, it has been a truly wonderful year for the AJR and as 2011 draws to an end today is a fitting finale to some fabulous events in celebration of our three score years and ten.

Hopefully, some of you had the opportunity to participate in the fascinating series of lectures, talks and discussions we organised at the London Jewish Cultural Centre in the summer which included a contribution from the former Deputy Ambassador Eckhard Lübke as well as an array of speakers regaling us with anecdotes and the history of the refugees and their absorption into their adopted homeland.

The remarkable contribution the Jewish refugees who fled Nazi oppression – principally from Germany – made to Britain has been well documented but their impact was wholly disproportionate to their number. Undoubtedly, the world would be poorer but for the endeavours of Sir Ernst Gombrich, Andrew Sachs and Sir Hans Krebs or for Arthur Kessler's writing, Judith Kerr's stories or the cerebral discussions at Club '43. Their efforts in so many fields shaped post-war Britain and it is our fervent hope that their work will endure.

Your Excellency, the advent of National Socialism robbed Germany of one of its most vibrant and dynamic communities. It persecuted and exiled peoples who had fought for their homeland and who built its rightful reputation as one of *the* enlightened and cosmopolitan countries.

And like the refugees themselves we are constantly looking forward. While our shared history has brought us together today, we can all take great pride in our roles to ensure that one of the defining episodes of the 20th century is never forgotten, diminished or repeated.

We are thrilled that our ground breaking Holocaust testimony project Refugee Voices is now accessible at both the Freie Universität in Berlin and the Forschungsstelle für Zeitgeschichte in Hamburg. We are also colleagues on the Task Force for International Cooperation on Education,

Remembrance and Research and have jointly pledged to teach, to study and to commemorate the Holocaust in perpetuity.

Every year AJR members return to their cities of birth in Germany to talk to school pupils – sometimes at the very school they attended – about their experiences or to lay Stolpersteine in memory of lost relatives. Our members also enjoyed the hospitality of the Governing Mayor of Berlin, Klaus Wowereit, at a reception at the Rathaus a few years ago.

Unsurprisingly, Germany is at the forefront of addressing post-Holocaust issues from restitution to the opening up of archives and you will have seen the Foreign Secretary's remarks last week at the launch of the UK copy of the records of the International Tracing Service of which Germany will shortly take over governance responsibility.

The AJR can be proud of *all* the activities and services we provide but at the heart of our work is the provision of social and welfare services to those of our members with the greatest need. And it is here that we – together with the Claims Conference – partner the German government in delivering critical assistance to refugees and survivors facing medical, care and financial difficulties. We know that Germany takes seriously its commitment to funding vital social and welfare services that can have a life-changing impact on our members and this year alone we will distribute more than £1m of Homecare assistance funded by the German government.

As we know, today is a double celebration. Chanukah relates the story of the Macabees struggle to rededicate the temple. It is a tale of triumph over adversity; the same can be said for AJR members who rebuilt their lives having escaped and survived oppression.

On behalf of everyone connected to the AJR I would like to thank you again, Your Excellency, for opening your residency and to everyone involved in organising today's gathering. As is the season, I wish you all a Chanukah Sameach, Merry Christmas and a Happy and prosperous New Year.
Thank you.