

Einweihung Bergisch Gladbach Square, Beit Jala, 14.09.2018

Lutz Urbach

Dear Mayor Nicola Khamis,

Dear friends in Beit Jala,

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, I'm happy to bring cordial hugs and greetings from Bergisch Gladbach! Thank you for your hospitality and friendship!

We appreciate your yearly invitation to the Cultural Festival for Peace, but this year we are very happy to celebrate the inauguration of the Bergisch Gladbach Square.

In September 2015 you, dear Nicola, came to Bergisch Gladbach to inaugurate our Beit Jala Square, in German: Beit Jala-Platz. Then I talked about the meaning of a square, where the different paths of the people intersect, where people meet and talk.

Actually, a square is a symbol of our town twinning. Like a square our town twinning activities are occasions when our different paths intersect and when we exchange our thoughts and experiences. A place of lively communication!

Today we want to inaugurate another square in Beit Jala, the second square highlighting our special partnership. Thank you for this gift from your heart!

It is an honor that this special place is dedicated to our town.

At this place, you see, there is the well of Onah, Bir Onah. A well - that's another thing our towns have in common.

You know, the Bergisch Gladbach stream called Strunde is very important for our town. It even gave our town its complicated name.

Let tell me you that story. "Bergisch" refers to the counts of Berg who reigned over the place in medieval times. "Gladbach" means a creek that no longer runs naturally but is redirected.

And why do people redirect a creek? Of course, because they need the water somewhere else! Water is important in Palestine as well. So you know the problems. In fact the manufacturers of the little town Bergisch Gladbach needed the water for their mills.

During the Middle Ages a lot of millers settled down in the valleys and particularly the paper mills had always been very successful throughout the following decades. So, the water and the paper manufacturing belong to the identity of our town.

The well, the stream, the water – all these are symbols of hope and live, of well-being and prosperity!

Bergisch Gladbach grew during the years and today it is the county town with about 110.000 citizens – so we belong to the larger cities in Germany. We are a city where people like to live because of its good public infrastructure, because of its rich natural and rustic environment and because it is near the congested urban area of Cologne and Bonn.

People also love to work in Bergisch Gladbach since we have a lot of medium-sized trading and manufacturing companies as well as service enterprises.

And: Bergisch Gladbach has 10 twin towns! The first were in France, England and the Netherlands right after the Second World War. Later, after the Iron Curtain to the UDSSR had dropped we came into contact with cities that once were unreachable, in Poland and Lithuania. And then we made friends with Beit Jala and Ganey Tikva in the Near East!

You know, town twinning means for us to meet people that once had been our enemies that had lived behind the Iron Curtain, behind a large wall. This was a process, and it was not easy! There were lots of difficulties, misunderstandings, wounds, but we learned that it is a precious gift to stay in contact and to stand together.

In regard to the Brexit, the fact that Great Britain leaves the European Union, it becomes more important that citizens again stand together where politicians can't, that citizens nourish their friendship. That is the basis.

But people need landmarks or memorials to remember in daily life. Therefore our twin towns find a dedicated street or place in Bergisch Gladbach. It is important to have such memorials of our friendships!

Therefore I'm glad to inaugurate the new sculpture on the new Bergisch Gladbach Square, as an even stronger symbol and memorial of our town twinning: Two large letters "B" - for Beit Jala and Bergisch Gladbach - that cling together.

You collected money to realize this sculpture. Funding such a sculpture shows the donators' identification with the town friendship. Thank you to all donators, to all who funded money, and thank you to the artist Akram Anastas!

Dear Mr. Anastas you are well known for a lot of sculptures presenting Saint George the dragon slayer or shepherds like those from the holy field of Bethlehem. You also caved the Lamp of the City of Peace Bethlehem for Pope Francis. And know you sculpted the two B's, the symbol of our town twining! Thank you very much!

Well, my dear friends, let's work together for places in our hearts and for squares in our towns where people meet, where people learn to know each other and to accept each other, where iron curtains in our minds fall, where inexperience becomes a new and good experience and where hate becomes love. Then the exchange of people and peoples not only will be soothing and lively, but also lasting and full of hope for the future.

Best wishes for all the people in Beit Jala.

Peace be with you! As-salāmu alaikum!

Weitere Information für Lutz:

The legend of Bir 'Onah (The Well of 'Onah)

Going down the road from Mar Nichola's Church northwards, one reaches the bottom of the valley where Bir (Well) 'Onah is situated, about which a very well known story connected with the Virgin Mary is told.

According to this story the Virgin Mary once passed by the well while some women were drawing water. She asked for water to drink, but the women inhospitably refused her request. The Virgin then knelt on the well-mouth, and asked God to offer her a drink of water. The water was soon raised from the Well and Virgin drank, then the water receded. The Virgin's kneeling left traces on the well-mouth.

<http://www.palestine-family.net/index.php?nav=6-20&cid=8&did=6312>

Von Axel Becker:

Die Wasserquelle diente als Dorfbrunnen, in dem die Frauen früher Wasser holten. Heute wird er nicht mehr benutzt, führt aber noch etwas Wasser.

Auf dem Platz haben die Kirchen von Beit Jala ökumenische Gottesdienste als Demonstration gegen den Bau der nahegelegenen Mauer (durch das Cremisan-Tal) abgehalten. Sie wurden von den Israelis argwöhnisch beobachtet; es ist wohl auch mit Tränengas gearbeitet worden.