

Erinnerungsort

Olympia-Attentat München 1972

Munich 1972 Massacre Memorial

The Place of Remembrance and Information commemorates the attack on the Israeli Olympic team at the XXth Summer Games in Munich in 1972. It places a special focus on the biographies of the victims. However, it is not possible to convey the information appropriately without embedding the events of September 5 and 6, 1972 in their (cultural-)historical and political context. To ensure an in-depth understanding of those events, the presentation at the new memorial will set the following priorities:

1. The Attack
2. The Victims' Biographies
3. Contextualization
 - The political dimension of the Olympic Games in general
 - The specific significance of the 1972 Summer Games for Germany
 - The Arab-Israeli conflict
 - The emergence of Palestinian terrorism and the attackers of *Black September*

The Attack

On the morning of September 5, 1972, eight members of the terrorist organization *Black September* forced their way into the Olympic Village. Their destination was Connollystrasse 31, where members of the Israeli team had their quarters. The terrorists took eleven Israeli athletes hostage: Andrei Spitzer (fencing trainer), Yakov Springer (weightlifting judge), Yossef Romano (weightlifter), Yossef Gutfreund (wrestling referee), Moshe Muni Weinberg (wrestling coach), Ze'ev Friedman (weightlifter), David Berger (weightlifter), Eliezer Halfin (wrestler), Amitzur Shapira (track-and-field coach), Kehat Schor (marksmen coach) and Mark Slavin (wrestler).

Moshe Muni Weinberg and Yossef Romano—both of whom attempted to resist the terrorists—were murdered at Connollystrasse 31.

Following several failed attempts to liberate the hostages, the crisis management team—consisting of Federal Minister of the Interior Hans-Dietrich Genscher, Munich's Chief of Police Dr. Manfred Schreiber and Bavarian Minister of the Interior Dr. Bruno Merk—resolved to have the terrorists and the hostages taken to the Fürstenfeldbruck airfield on

the pretense of flying the terrorists from there to Cairo. The plan was now to liberate the hostages at the Fürstenfeldbruck airbase. The police failed in this attempt, and the operation ended in disaster. All of the hostages and the German police sergeant Anton Fliegerbauer, as well as five of the terrorists, died.

The Victims' Biographies

The biographies of the eleven Israeli athletes and the German policeman will form the central narrative of the exhibition at the Place of Remembrance. The aim is to give the victims a face.

The presentation will provide scope for the life stories and individual memories of these persons. In describing the victims' origins and life stages and their impact on posterity, these biographies will also offer insights into Israeli society and its diversity.

The athletes' biographies are a striking mirror of the heterogeneous Israeli society, which to this day consists primarily of immigrants and faces the constant challenge of coming to terms with issues of identity and co-existence.

Contextualization

The political dimension of the Olympic Games

The decision to institute the Olympic Games in modern times was informed by the idea of overcoming national egotisms in the spirit of international understanding. What is more, the Olympic Games have always represented a kind of alternative plan to the inherent laws of the historical world. This continues to lie at the core of the Games, and as a result—above and beyond the world of sports—the significance of the event for the image-building efforts of the respective venue can hardly be overestimated.

On the international level, the Olympic Summer Games offered the Federal Republic of Germany an opportunity to generate the image of a cosmopolitan, liberal, democratic country. In 1972, the international importance and perception of the Federal Republic was not particularly pronounced, and was moreover subjected to definition in clear foreign policy guidelines. Western Germany's political actions were always considered from the perspective of the pressure on the country to prove its integrity after the breach of civilization that the National Socialist era represented.

For Western Germany, the 1972 Summer Olympics were therefore of the utmost significance: they were nothing less than an endeavor to counter the memory of the Nazi past—and in particular the 1936 Olympics in Berlin—with the image of a modern, pluralistic republic within the framework of cheerful and peaceful Games.

The import of the attack is all the more evident against this background, and the Place of Remembrance will accordingly emphasize the idea of the *cheerful* Games. The 1972 Olympics were an attempt to bring the post-war era to a close once and for all. Munich presented itself as a modern and open cosmopolitan city, and the country as a new and democratic Germany. The accompanying security concept was in no way to evoke memories of the past. In particular, it was not to trigger associations of a police state, for example with the conspicuous presence of security personnel.

The Arab-Israeli conflict

The event forming the focus of the presentation—the attack on the Olympic Games—represents a turning point in the recent history of international politics. To help visitors understand the extent of its momentousness, the Place of Remembrance will feature a section on the development of the Arab-Israeli conflict that led to the disaster, from its beginnings to the day of the attack. Naturally, this focus cannot exceed the bounds of a subsidiary theme, tailored to the purposes of the exhibition's main aim, which cannot and will not be a comprehensive illumination of the conflict.

Already long before the founding of the State of Israel, Palestine was characterized by many sources of conflict: social, ethnic and religious contrasts, premodern forms of government, and the legacy of European colonialism. It was a region inhabited primarily by Arabs until the mid-twentieth century, but Jews had always lived there as well. From the late nineteenth century onward, the Jewish proportion of the population had increased significantly owing to several waves of immigration that only made the contrasts starker. During the Holocaust and immediately after it, for example, some 300,000 Jews fled to Palestine.

Great Britain, which governed the affairs of Palestine on behalf of the United Nations since the end of World War One, tried to limit this influx. Jewish and Arab groups contended with the British, but also with one another, for supremacy over the land. In view of the chaotic circumstances and the massive increase in violence, the British government relinquished responsibility for the territory to the United Nations. In November 1947, the UN resolved the establishment two states, Jewish and Arab. This plan was welcomed by

the Jewish side but rejected by the Arab population. The months that followed were dominated by armed conflicts between the two groups. On May 14, 1948, David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the State of Israel. The neighboring Arab countries attacked the newly founded state, but Israel succeeded in asserting its claim to existence. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian Arabs fled or were driven from their native land.

In this difficult situation, Israel sent a larger delegation to Munich than it had ever sent to any Olympic venue before.

The emergence of Palestinian terrorism and the attackers of *Black September*

The eight terrorists who carried out the kidnapping at the Olympic Games belonged to the organization known as *Black September* that had grown out of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The Egyptian head of state Gamal Abdel Nasser had taken it on himself to act as the spokesman of the Palestinians, and in 1964 had initiated the founding of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to represent that people officially. The PLO's express aim was to eliminate the State of Israel and found an independent Palestinian state.

As a consequence of the ensuing failure to prevail against Israel militarily, the Palestinian organization resolved to "internationalize" its struggle, and came to play a leading role in international terrorism by carrying out spectacular attacks.

After the Six-Day War, an increasing number of militant Palestinian groups based themselves in Jordan, where they posed an ever graver threat to the Jordanian royal house. They controlled entire regions in the country's north, where they virtually established a state within a state.

In early September 1970, Palestinian terrorists made an attempt on the life of King Hussein of Jordan. Shortly thereafter, the *People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine* (PFLP) hijacked five airplanes and, before the eyes of the world public, blew up three of them on Jordanian soil. In response, King Hussein drove the majority of Palestinians and their organizations out of the country. Palestinians were massacred in the process, and their countrymen referred to the bloody struggle from then on as *Black September*.

In 1971, a terrorist organization formed and adopted the name *Black September* in reference to the events in Jordan. Its aim was to take revenge on the Jordanian crown

and—like all Palestinian terrorist organizations—fight against Israel. *Black September* carried out assassinations and attacked business enterprises it deemed ideologically committed to “imperialism and Zionism.”

In 1972, not only was the sports event a media spectacle that drew wide international attention; the attack would also be a global media event. Television stations all over the world reported live on the developments of September 5 and 6. For the first time ever, audiences could watch a terrorist attack unfold in real time on their TV screens. In the public perception, the Munich Massacre is therefore generally considered the natal hour of international terrorism, for which reason it has taken on special significance in the history of international terrorism.