



## Städtepartnerschaft

Bergisch Gladbach – Beit Jala e.V.

Städtepartnerschaft Bergisch Gladbach -  
Beit Jala e.V.  
Postfach 20 09 03, 51439 Bergisch  
Gladbach

Inauguration of the Bergisch Gladbach Square in Beit Jala, 14. Sept. 2018  
Speech of Axel Becker, Chairperson of the Bergisch Gladbach-Beit Jala  
twinning Association

Dear Mayor Nicola Khamis,  
Honorable Excellencies,  
Dear friends in Beit Jala

On behalf of the Bergisch Gladbach-Beit Jala Twinning Association I thank  
you, dear Mayor Nicola, for the invitation to the Festival and to this  
inauguration ceremony for the Bergisch Gladbach Square.

For us it is a very important moment in the history of our city relationship-

It was in 2001, when we, my wife Sabine and me, came the first time to the  
Holy Land and in 2003 we participated in the inauguration of the Lutheran  
Guesthouse Beit Ibrahim. We were impressed by the vision of this project: to  
bring together people of the three religions, Jewish, Christian and Islam. It  
was the vision of living together in peace even there exist deep differences  
between all.

**Brücken statt Mauern** für Menschen in Palästina und Israel

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The mayor of that time, Raji Zeidan, explained to us, that Beit Jala and its people would highly appreciate an official partnership with a German town, as it exists between Bethlehem and the city of Cologne.

After this beginning we visited at least once in every year this wonderful town and we fell in love with its people. We brought citizens from Bergisch Gladbach, to share this experience and to see, what the life is here. They came back and talked about their experience to their families and friends in Germany.

In this process the Twin City Agreement of the year 2011 was born. After it, citizens of Bergisch Gladbach established the "Twinning Association" with today 180 members. The Association promotes and organizes many activities, and we could welcome various persons and organizations of Beit Jala in our town. With our municipality and actually with our mayor Lutz Urbach, we share mutual support in all twinning affairs with Beit Jala.

To express the vision of our Association we found the motto "Brücken statt Mauern", that means: Bridges instead of Walls. We had in mind the walls, which we saw in Beit Jala, the separation wall, which deeply affects the life of the citizens. The hope is, that it should fall down one day, as we Germans experienced in Berlin in the year 1989.

But today, standing on this newly named Bergisch Gladbach Square we see more walls under this bridge. We feel the bitterness of you, who have lost the lovely green areas of Cremisan. And also, we sometimes deplore, that our dreams of peace and justice for our twinned city are seriously threatened or even destroyed.

But today, dear friends in Beit Jala, being at your site on this square, we will bring you the message: We will not give up!

We will not give up our hope, our work for peace and understanding, our friendship with you.

Since a few days ago the famous Queen of Soul, Aretha Franklin, passed away, and we could see how millions of people all over the world are touched by her music and her personal commitment. Especially when she insisted:

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RESPECT, RESPECT: let us live together in mutual respect, let us overcome all discrimination.

This are the desires of so many people in the region: They are tired by the permanent conflicts and by illegal domination and violence. This is true for the majority of Palestinians and Israelis as well.

The sculpture here has a message: The two Bs are closely linked together in equal relations and friendship.

And this message has to be carried out widely on the wings of the bird,

- to reach the hearts of all rulers to change their way to nonviolent and respectful understanding-

- and to encourage the people, who suffers, not to give up their hope for freedom, and to work to bring this hope to reality.-

In October we will come again to visit Beit Jala with a group of 20 People from Bergisch Gladbach!



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