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Secretary General Hannah Lessing Receives the Max and Trude Berger Prize from Vienna’s Jewish Museum

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On Tuesday 6 December 2016, the Secretary General of the National Fund for Victims of National Socialism, Hannah Lessing, received the Max and Trude Berger Prize for exceptional services to the Jewish Museum, Vienna. The Israeli ambassador to Austria was also present at the award ceremony and held the citation in honor of the recipient.

In her words of welcome the director of Vienna's Jewish Museum, Dr. Danielle Spera, emphasized the good relations with the National Fund and highlighted the support it had provided for its exhibitions such as "Simon Wiesenthal in Vienna" or "The Better Half. Jewish Artists up to 1938" and for a currently ongoing project to reconstruct the Viennese synagogues that were destroyed in the November pogrom of 1938.

In her speech in praise of Hannah Lessing, the Israeli ambassador to Austria, Talya Lador-Fresher referred to the 60 years of diplomatic relations between Austria and Israel, adding: "When looking at Austria's shared historical responsibility and the financial redress, it is impossible to overlook the pivotal role played by Hannah Lessing. Institutions such as the National Fund are also vital for Austria, even when, one day, there are no more surviving victims of the Shoah. The transmission of knowledge to the younger generations is an important and pressing task. To achieve it, we need people like Hannah, with a head and a heart."

Secretary General Lessing expressed her gratitude for the award and stressed the important educational role of Vienna's Jewish Museum. "We are partners in a large number projects that convey to people the fates of the Austrian Jews," stated Lessing in her acceptance speech. "As collectors, the Berger spouses' contribution has ensured that we, today, can gain an impression of Jewish life in Central Europe that was on the verge of being completely wiped out by the Nazis. It is therefore a great honor for me to be awarded the Max and Trude Berger Prize by the Jewish Museum, Vienna."

The speech in praise of the second award winner, Stefan Stoltzka, CEO of the Legero Schuhfabrik GmbH, was held by Jasper Sharp, adjunct curator of the Vienna Art History Museum. Theo Lieder provided the event with musical accompaniment.

The Max and Trude Berger Prize is named after the eponymous couple, who were collectors. The Berger Collection is one of the most exceptional Judaica collections in the world. The majority of the artifacts originate from the time of the Habsburg Monarchy and they range from the elaborate Torah crowns to the folksy Esther Scrolls. The Max Berger Collection is the Vienna Jewish Museum's second largest collection after that of the Jewish Community, Vienna.