

Jews converge in Basel to mark 125 years since First Zionist Congress

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BASEL – About 1,400 guests will gather in Basel, Switzerland, on Sunday to mark the 125th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress in a three-day event, corresponding with the same dates in 1897.

The conference is being organized by the World Zionist Organization in cooperation with the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities and the Government of the Basel Canton.

The event will begin in the Stadtcasino Hall, where the First Zionist Congress took

place. This is where the first 208 delegates discussed their vision for the establishment of the Jewish state.

One of the main events at the gathering will be the restoration of the historical photo of Theodor Herzl, whose picture was taken on the railing of the balcony of the Three

Kings Hotel in Basel. President Isaac Herzog is expected to not only have his picture taken on the famous balcony, but also sleep in the room where the father of modern political Zionism stayed.

The synagogue where Herzl prayed on the Shabbat before the first congress has hung

the screen for the Torah ark it received from the Knesset 25 years ago as a gift.

Following warnings about huge pro-Palestinian demonstrations, the Swiss government passed and has set aside a €5.7 million security budget. The Rhine River will be closed to ship traffic

and airspace will be closed for the duration of the congress, with the area of the hall to be secured by thousands of security personnel.

The conference itself will be divided into two parts. One is the Herzl Leadership Conference that will focus on modern Zionism. The other is the

Impact Conference for social and economic entrepreneurship that will host 125 leading entrepreneurs from the hi-tech industry, who were carefully selected from thousands of nominations and requests.

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and entrepreneurial spirit. As the president of the nation-state of the Jewish people, I am thrilled and proud to see Herzl's vision come to life before our eyes and feel a heavy commitment and responsibility for the future of the State of Israel and the Jewish people."

"Today's State of Israel is the fulfillment of Herzl's vision in Basel," Hagoel said. "Herzl dreamed and also hoped that the Jewish home would be a light to the gentiles and a house from which light would emanate to the nations of the world. We see today that the State of Israel assists the nations of the world at any given moment, bringing Herzl's dream and vision and that of the other delegates who came to Basel from all over the world to fruition. Israeli society is very solid and strong, continuing Herzl's light even 125 years after that first congress."

During the events, Herzog will meet Swiss President Ignazio Cassis and senior government officials, as well as members of the Government of the Canton of Basel-Stadt and Swiss-Jewish community representatives. A groundbreaking agreement between the Israeli and Swiss national science foundations will be signed in the presence of their countries' presidents.

With regard to his diplomatic visit to the country, Herzog said that "Switzerland is an important country on a global level, as reflected both in international organizations, including the Red Cross, and on the European diplomatic stage.

"During my visit, I shall meet President Cassis and discuss important diplomatic, securi-

ty and economic issues with him, including the strengthening of our partnership in the fields of scientific and technological R&D," he said. "As part of our strong partnership, we will both mark the signing of a groundbreaking agreement between our respective countries' national science foundations."

As revealed by *The Jerusalem Post*, Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement-affiliated organizations are planning a number of demonstrations. According to the official Swiss BDS Facebook page, "This commemorative political event, supported by the Basel government and secured by a massive police and military presence, affirms the supremacy of right-wing organizations over the importance and history of Zionism."

The BDS group also claimed that, "Along with the WZO [World Zionist Organization], this anniversary is also organized by an organization that plays an important role in illegal settlement building and systematic expropriation of Palestinian land." •

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A special gala evening will take place on Monday at the Stadtcasino in which Herzog will speak alongside Canton Basel Prime Minister Beat Jans, Minister of Economy Guy Parmelin (who is also a former president of Switzerland) and World Zionist Organization chairman Yaakov Hagoel. Jewish Agency chairman Doron Almog will also attend.

"The 125th anniversary of the First Zionist Congress in Basel is a historic landmark which was a defining event for the Jewish people and humanity as a whole," Herzog said. "Zionism is the ideal combination of deep Jewish roots and groundbreaking innovation