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New Romanian Holocaust museum

By Luciana Friedmann in Bucharest

Updated: 15/Sep/2005 17:47

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Simleu Silvaniei mayor during his speech

The first fully functional Holocaust museum in northern Transylvania, was officially launched this week in the former synagogue building of the small Romanian town of Simleu Silvaniei.

Transylvania is located in the centre of Romania.

More than 400 people attended the opening of the Northern Transylvania Holocaust Museum on 11 September.

Those present included Romanian government officials, leaders of Romanian Jewry, and representatives of the US, Israel and Hungary embassies, together with dozens of survivors from Romania and

"Romania has made impressive progress toward transparency in terms of remembering the Holocaust in recent years, in particular, with the creation of the International Wiesel commission, the handing of its report and the commitment of the government to carry out his recommendations," Heilbronn said.

"We believe that this is a moment of great importance. The opening of the Northern Transylvania Holocaust Museum is an example of the ongoing emphasis on the memory of the Holocaust in Romania."

Dr. Jose Blum

Dr. Jose Blum, cultural adviser to the Federation of Jewish Communities in Romania (FEDROM), said the museum was a fitting tribute to those Romanians killed in the Shoah.

Blum said: "We believe that this is a moment of great importance. The opening of the Northern Transylvania Holocaust Museum is an example of the ongoing emphasis on the memory of the Holocaust in Romania."

The Museum is be a documentation centre for young people all over Romania, and will included image archives, testimonies and documents.

It was not a coincidence to choose 9/11 as the day of the opening.

The organizers wanted to emphasize the two tragedies, bringing a tribute for the victims, especially for a woman who died in the American tragedy and who's parents where deported from Simleul Silvaniei decades ago.

Tiny community

The old synagogue of Simleu Silvaniei, now transformed into the museum, was built in 1876. It served the surrounding community until May-June 1944, when the Jewish population was forcedly evicted from their homes.

After a short but very cruel experience in the ghetto, they were put in cattle cars and transported to Auschwitz Birkenau.

Only approximately 10 per cent of North Transylvania Jewry, part of Hungary at that time, survived the Holocaust. Today only 20 Jews live in Simleu Silvaniei.



Inside the new museum

However, the local non-Jewish population have been fully supportive of the museum project which gained the backing of the City and County Administration, while children from the schools of Simleu Silvaniei will volunteer in the Museum.