

UPF Burgenland, Austria Peace Festival Commemorates Holocaust Victims

Johann Rechberger
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Secretary General, UPF-Burgenland



Parndorf, Austria – The Parndorf Memorial Site is a World War II and Holocaust memorial that commemorates local residents who were killed by the Nazi regime for their Jewish faith, political views or physical and mental disabilities. On May 17, 2026, UPF-Burgenland, in cooperation with the site’s creators and the Municipality of Parndorf, hosted the fourth Festival of Peace – a moving event honoring those victims. The well-attended ceremony was characterized by a dignified yet hopeful atmosphere.



Actress **Ms. Valentina Himmelbauer** skillfully moderated the evening. In her opening remarks, she emphasized that the event was not only an invitation to pause and reflect, but also a call to look beyond the past and take responsibility for the future. She highlighted core values such as reconciliation, remorse, forgiveness, solace and humanity - universal principles essential at every level of life, from families and communities to nations and international relations.



The young woodwind trio Cantovento from Burgenland – **Ms. Marie-Theres Allacher** on flute, **Ms.**

Hannah Sachslehner on oboe, and **Mr. Noah Rak** on clarinet, under the direction of Ms. Marina Fleischhacker – provided outstanding musical accompaniment. Trained at the Frauenkirchen Music School, the ensemble achieved a state victory at the 2026 "Prima la Musica" competition.



Vice Mayor **Mr. Wolfgang Daniel** represented Mayor Mr. Wolfgang Kovac. In his welcome address, he stressed the importance of respectful coexistence and an active culture of remembrance as foundations for a peaceful future. He thanked the associations and initiatives that enrich social and cultural life in Parndorf.

The long-time local Catholic parish priest **Mag. Franz Borenitsch** read from the Bible. Ms. Himmelbauer praised him as one who embodies faith as a unifying force and offers comfort through genuine human connection.



Mag. Elisabeth Brandner-Balkovic, a Burgenland-Croatian author specializing in regional contemporary history and women's stories, spoke about two remarkable figures: trade unionist and resistance fighter Hanna Sturm, and Käthe Sasso, who would have turned 100 in 2026. With great

empathy, she brought historical events to life and gave voice to often-overlooked individuals.



Dr. Christa Wendelin, head of the working group that built the memorial site, reported on forced laborers along the Austrian-Hungarian border and shared her latest research findings. She emphasized that remembrance must go beyond abstract reflection to make the people behind the events – their fates, hopes, and losses – visible. Under her leadership, the memorial site was created as a place that both warns and inspires hope.



Mr. Johann Rechberger, head of UPF-Burgenland, recounted the moving story of Hungarian Jew Ernő Lazarovits, who survived the death march from Rechnitz to Mauthausen and was liberated in Gunskirchen in May 1945. Mr. Rechberger read excerpts from Lazarovits' book "My Way Through Hell." One particularly powerful moment described a half-starved fellow prisoner pulling the collapsed Lazarovits to his feet and whispering, "Get up – if you stay down, you're dead." Mr. Rechberger highlighted that the routes of Hungarian-Jewish forced laborers also passed through Burgenland, leaving traces of suffering that are part of today's landscape.

The event also featured the opening of the exhibition "What Now," provided by the World Holocaust Remembrance Center Yad Vashem. It explores the challenging new beginnings faced by Jewish survivors after 1945 – the pain of memory and the strength to rebuild life. The opening address was delivered by **Mag. Johannes Reiss**, longtime director of the Jewish Museum Eisenstadt and widely known as "the Transcriber" for his dedicated work documenting Jewish cemeteries and gravestones. Mr. Reiss combines scholarly precision with deep sensitivity for individual stories.

Ms. Himmelbauer concluded the formal program by inviting guests to visit the exhibition and enjoy the buffet while engaging in conversation. The evening ended in an atmosphere of deep emotion and respectful exchange, with many attendees visibly moved by the personal stories they had heard.

Mr. Rechberger captured the essence of the event: "Remembrance is a decision – a decision about how we want to live. A decision whether we stand with one another or against one another."

ORF Burgenland TV featured a detailed report on the event the following evening. Organizers and participants expressed high satisfaction and confirmed that the commemoration would return next year.