

Argentina

Background Information for Jewish Communities Around the World

Name of Community

Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations

Currently head of the Jewish Community

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General Information

Argentina is home to over 200,000 Jews, or 0.7% of the population, making it the largest Jewish community in Latin America and the sixth largest in the world. Although there is a sizable Sephardic minority, the majority of Argentine Jews are Ashkenazi, with roots in Central and Eastern Europe. The Jewish community is also particularly diverse in terms of observance and cultural affiliation socioeconomic levels.

While Argentina's official language is Spanish and, at least the second language by nearly all of Argentina's population, Italian, English, and French are also often spoken.

Around 90% of Argentine Jews live in Buenos Aires, with the rest living in Rosario, Cordoba, and Santa Fe. The Jewish population is divided between those belonging to Orthodox synagogues and those connected with the Conservative stream, with the reform movement having a significantly smaller following. Much like other Jewish communities around the world, congregants of these synagogues do not necessarily identify with the respective streams on an ideological basis.

The Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA) is the formal Argentinian affiliate of the World Jewish Congress, but there is long-standing cooperation between the DAIA and the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA), which participates actively in meetings of the WJC Plenary Assembly and Governing Board under the DAIA umbrella.

Historical Information

The Jewish community dates to the 16th century and the Spanish and Portuguese Inquisitions when Jews fled to Argentina to escape persecution.

Despite the centuries of Jewish settlement, however, there is little record of Jewish life in the country prior to the 19th century. Jewish immigration surged in 1854, culminating with the establishment in 1862 of the Israelite Congregation of Buenos Aires, the first Jewish institution in the country.

On 14 August 1889, 130 Jewish families fleeing antisemitism and persecution in the Russian Empire arrived in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to restart their lives and begin a Jewish community. While the 824 Russian Jews were not the first Jews to arrive in Argentina, they were the first to establish a Jewish agricultural settlement in South America.

The group eventually purchased Moises Ville in Argentina's Santa Fe province, after discovering the land they originally intended to purchase in Buenos Aires was unavailable. After an unfortunately high mortality rate in their first year there, they decided to stay. Once they buried their loved ones, few moved away from the land.

The community was named in honor of European Jewish philanthropist Baron Maurice de Hirsch, who was instrumental in building the community. When Hirsch learned of the initial difficulties in establishing a strong community, he created the Jewish Colonization Association, which sponsored thousands of European Jews to live in Moises Ville and other colonies. Many of the Jewish immigrants became ranchers and farmers. Eventually, they came to be accepted by the local Argentine Gauchos, or cowboys.

During the period leading up to World War I, the mostly Ashkenazi population was bolstered by the arrival of Jews from the Levant. In 1884, the country's various Jewish organizations united to form the Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina (AMIA) and would evolve into one of Argentina's central Jewish institutions. The Jewish community began to urbanize, and later, decades after the war, there were few signs left of the country's once-flourishing Jewish agricultural community.

The first key outbreak of hostility to the Jewish community in Argentina followed the start of the Russian revolution, which was a time of violent labor unrest of which the members of the Jewish community were blamed for. Attacks led to the Buenos Aires pogrom of January 1919, which took thousands of Jewish lives. The pogrom caused many Jews to question the faith they had in the government.

Latin American governments officially permitted only about 84,000 Jewish refugees to immigrate between 1933 and 1945. The number was less than half the number admitted during the previous fifteen years, although other Jews entered these countries through illegal channels. The refusal to allow more Jews into Latin America during the Holocaust stemmed from several sources, including antisemitism.

After World War II, Argentina became home to one of the world's largest communities of Holocaust survivors, but also provided refuge to many former Nazis.

On 11 May 1960, a small team of Israeli Mossad agents captured senior Nazi officer Adolf Eichmann in Argentina. While the manhunt for Eichmann was launched in 1945, the first major breakthrough came in 1957 when the prosecutor of the German state of Hesse, Fritz Bauer, reported to the Israeli secret service that Eichmann was in hiding in Argentina, under the false name of Ricardo Klement. In March 1960, the Mossad

confirmed that Eichmann was in fact in Argentina and developed a plan to capture him and bring him back to Israel to stand trial for his war crimes.

The operation complicated Israeli-Argentinian relations as Argentina was furious, alleging that Israel violated its sovereignty. Nevertheless, Eichmann's capture and the subsequent trial proved to be a watershed moment, as it helped raise global awareness of the Holocaust, demonstrated Israel's willingness to assert itself on the global stage, and put the subject of pursuing justice for Nazi atrocities on the world agenda.

The early 1990s saw, two serious terror attacks against the local Jewish population and Israel, shattering the community's feeling of security. In 1992, the Israeli embassy was bombed, 29 people were killed and around 250 wounded in a Hezbollah-linked truck bombing at the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires.

On 18 July 1994, 85 people were killed and hundreds more wounded in a Hezbollah-perpetrated bombing attack of the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) building. This was the deadliest terrorist attack in Latin American history as well as against any Jewish target outside of Israel. Nearly thirty years after the horrific bombing, none of the perpetrators has yet been brought to trial, despite arrest warrants issued and constant calls for justice.

Despite international attention, the case has been met with roadblocks, foot-dragging, and talk of corruption at nearly every turn. And while 22 defendants would eventually be charged with complicity in the attack, all have been acquitted.

In September 2004, the Attorney General's Office appointed Attorney General Alberto Nisman and District Attorney Marcelo Martínez Burgo to oversee the investigation into the attack. A little over two years later, on 25 October 2006, Nisman published a nearly 700-page report formally accusing the Iranian regime of masterminding the Hezbollah executed attack. The report called for the arrest of Iranian President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani (1989 – 1997), Hezbollah Chief of Staff Imad Mughniyeh, and several Iranian cabinet officials and high-ranking diplomats. Other international agencies, including Interpol, have also issued arrest warrants. Nisman was found dead in his apartment on 18 January 2015; the cause of his death has not yet been determined.

In late February 2019, a federal criminal court prosecuted and acquitted several individuals accused of obstructing the investigation into the attack. Prominent individuals such as former Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas (DAIA) President Rubén Beraja and former President Carlos Menem (1989-1999) were acquitted, while the former federal judge Juan José Galeano, who was originally in charge of the case, and former intelligence chief Hugo Anzorreguy were sentenced to six years and four and half years in prison respectively.

Notable People from the Jewish Community

Name of Notable Person	Profession	Description of Accomplishments
César Milstein (Deceased)	Immunologist	Nobel Prize in Medicine winner
Alina Akselrad (Living)	Model	Miss Universe Argentina 2020
Mario J. Blejer (Living)	Economist	Former President of the Central Bank of Argentina.
Beatriz Rojkés de Alperovich (Living)	Politics	ex-Provisional President of the Senate

Government Information

There have been several laws passed in recent years advancing the interest of the Jewish community.

In November 2017, the Argentina Senate unanimously passed a law calling for an annual Memorial Day on March 17 in condemnation of the embassy attack and in honor of its victims. The legislation also called for the Ministry of Education “to raise awareness about the consequences of international terrorism and in favor of peace and nonviolence.” The legislation passed a little over a decade after the Argentina Parliament passed legislation compensating victims of the 1992 attack.

In 2019 on the 25th anniversary of the attack on the AMIA bombing, the Argentine government designated Hezbollah as a terrorist organization and froze the group’s financial assets. The decision was welcomed by WJC President Ronald S. Lauder as a “long-awaited and principled step.”

June 2020 Argentina [adopted](#) the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of antisemitism, as announced by the Foreign Ministry a day prior. In announcing this decision, the Foreign Ministry underscored its intention of contributing to the fight against antisemitic incidents. The resolution called on all branches of government to use the definition “to contribute to the fight of the Argentine Republic against antisemitism in all its forms, collaborate in the construction of a culture of prevention of hostility and violence to which prejudice and intolerance lead, promote education for plurality and reinforce the task of guaranteeing the fulfillment of the objective of education, memory, and investigation of the Holocaust and its lessons for us and future generations.”

The adoption came after the WJC-affiliated Delegation of Israelite Associations of Argentina released a report in October 2019, stating that antisemitic incidents had more

than doubled in 2018 compared to 2017, and that of the 834 antisemitic incidents in 2018, 71% occurred online.

<http://https://www.ipost.com/diaspora/argentina-sees-107-percent-spike-in-antisemitism-603445>

Other Recent News from the Community:

- 1) <https://www.timesofisrael.com/more-than-100-headstones-smashed-at-jewish-cemetery-in-argentina/>
- 2) https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/jta/more-argentine-jews-made-the-move-to-israel-in-2020-despite-the-pandemic/article_ec16eb5c-9eaa-5a04-b1ea-c551b0e4448d.html