Dear Mayor Ron Huldai,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very delighted to welcome you, my dear colleague Ron Huldai, to the historic City Hall of your sister city. Welcome to Cologne! We are all very excited that you are here.

We are standing here in one of the oldest city halls in Germany virtually in the middle of the historic Jewish quarter. As you may know, Cologne is also the seat of the oldest Jewish community north of the Alps.

The Jewish community of Cologne was first mentioned in a charter dating from 321 Anno Domini. Over centuries, Jews in Cologne experienced phases of cooperation and tolerance as well as phases of hate, expulsion, murder and annihilation.

Today, with its 6,000 members, the Cologne Jewish community ranks among the largest in Germany.

Naturally as the relations between Cologne and Tel-Aviv seem today, their connecting force is the memory of the the Shoah. The memorial book “The Jewish victims of National Socialism in Cologne” alone documents the names of 7,000 Jews from Cologne, who have been murdered by the Nazis. As we know the actual number of victims from Cologne is much higher, about 11,000.

Cologne now tries hard to preserve and present its Jewish historical heritage. We are building a new museum in front of the town hall on top of the Jewish quarter with an overall investment of about 52 million Euros. The finds are spectacular, amongs
others the oldest literary texts in Jiddish, even before the finds of Cairo, were found here. And we can show just here, that the contribution of the Jews to German culture is more then the holocaust as our former federal president expressed it when he visited the excavations.

Building a relationship between our two countries and our two cities was therefore anything but likely. Following the extinction of the European Jews by Nazi-Germany walls of rejection had been erected. Cologne and Tel Aviv were in fact amongst the first cities which tried to get the people of both countries closer to one another.

Looking back at 52 years of close partnership and friendship we can say that we have been quite successful. I am saying this with deep gratitude. I would therefore like to thank you personally, dear Mayor Huldai, but also all councillors, your dedicated staff represented today by Eytan Schwartz and all citizens of Tel Aviv-Municipality, for this wonderful friendship! We are proud of it.

One very concrete and very practical expression of our friendship is the Peace Kindergarten in Yafo which has been donated by the City of Cologne to the citizens of Tel Aviv-Yafo in 1988.

24 years are a long time in the life of a building. I am very pleased that the Twin City Association Cologne – Tel Aviv-Yafo and especially its chairperson Monika Möller has started a fundraising campaign to help finance the necessary renovation work at the kindergarten. Thank you very much, Monika, for this initiative. And thanks a lot to you and all your members for all what you do in support of this unique sister city partnership. You are really doing a wonderful job!

I do very much hope that we will succeed in raising at least 50.000 Euros until the end of this year so that in 2013, during the twenty fifth anniversary, the renovation work can be completed. A good starting point will hopefully be the ProCent donation of 15.000 Euros, the fund set up by our municipal employees to support social projects in our sister cities.

The renovation of the peace kindergarten is also a wonderful joint venture between our cities. I was very pleased to learn that the Tel Aviv Foundation chaired by you,
dear Mayor Hulai, will add the same amount which we will collect here in Cologne. In other words: If we succeed in raising 50,000 Euros you will double it to 100,000 Euros, thus making the kindergarten an even more meaningful symbol of our close friendship and a peaceful future for our children.

In this spirit I would now like to hand over the first donation to you, Monika, and invite you, dear Mayor Huldai, to join in. May this symbolic act deepen our close ties even more.