

UPF Steyr, Austria bikes the 1945 death march of Hungarian Jews to Mauthausen

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October 26, 2020



Steyr, Austria -- Peace Road participants bicycled over 400 kilometers to remember the 1945 death march of Hungarian Jews to the Mauthausen concentration camp. To see a video summary of the event, [click here](#).

In 1945, during the last days of World War II, thousands of Jews from Hungary were forced to walk to Mauthausen under inhuman conditions. They were given hardly anything to eat, and many were barefoot. Hundreds of them were shot on the way when they collapsed from exhaustion.

Although for each of the past three years UPF of Upper Austria had organized Peace Road events on a section of the death march, together with mayors of neighboring communities, for 2020 we strongly felt that we should follow the whole route.

Under the theme "Paths Can Connect," six bicyclists covered the more than 400 kilometers (almost 250 miles) over six days, from October 21 to 26. Three other persons accompanied them in a vehicle. In addition, along the way several other bicyclists joined the Peace Road event for a day.



In addition to marking 75 years since the death march to Mauthausen, the Peace Road 2020 also marked 75 years since the end of World War II and the establishment of the United Nations; 30 years since the fall of the Iron Curtain (1989-1991); and 70 years since the beginning of the Korean War.

October 21: The cyclists set off from the village of Rechnitz and traveled to the Hungarian border. Because of the coronavirus restrictions we could not start the event in Hungary itself, but we met a group of UPF-Hungary volunteers at the border. The Austrian and Hungarian leaders of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), an organization that is affiliated with UPF, held up a Peace Road banner and exchanged national flags.

The first commemoration took place in Rechnitz, where in 1945 around 200 Jews were murdered in one

night. Mrs. Waltraud Simon, a lecturer with the Protestant Church in Rechnitz, offered a prayer, and Mr. Johannes Reis, director of the Austrian Jewish Museum in the city of Eisenstadt, explained what is known about the massacre.

On this first day the peace cyclists covered 95 kilometers, visited memorials, and were welcomed by the mayors in the communities of Eberau and Güssing.

October 22: We stayed overnight in the town of Fürstenfeld and were welcomed in the morning by the mayor in front of the town hall.



Then the peace cyclists traveled about 80 kilometers to the Liebenau district of the city of Graz. At the memorial in the town of Nitscha a historian spoke, and at the memorial in the town of Gleisdorf the cultural officer welcomed us. Afterward we were invited to lunch by the community. The next day, a very good report about the Peace Road event appeared on the Gleisdorf website: [click here](#).

In the Liebenau district of Graz, the last stop of the day, we remembered not only the victims of the death march but also the many forced laborers who were subjected to inhuman treatment. At each of the memorial sites we visited throughout the six days of the Peace Road event, we laid down a stone from the quarry at Mauthausen, where in April 2018 UPF and FFWPU representatives offered a liberation prayer.

October 23: On this day the peace cyclists covered 100 kilometers. We prayed at the memorial site in the town of Peggau. Although the landscape was wonderful, we couldn't forget that a concentration camp stood here 75 years ago and that people from many conquered countries in World War II lost their lives here.

After visiting the city of Bruck an der Mur to attend a small reception given by the local council, and the city of Leoben to stop at a memorial in for Austrian resistance fighters in the Second World War, we reached the town of Trofaiach. Here we concluded the day with a prayer at a memorial erected for 14 Austrians who lost their lives in the resistance against National Socialism.

October 24: On this day too, the cyclists covered almost 100 kilometers, including a stop at Präbichl Sattel, a 1,226-meter-high mountain pass where a massacre of Hungarian Jews took place 75 years ago. Random shots were fired into the crowd, and more than 200 people were killed. At the pass we read aloud a passage from a book written by the survivor Ernő Lazarovic, a UPF Ambassador for Peace who participated in the Middle East Peace Initiative. Then a participant offered a deep prayer.

At the foot of the mountain, in the town of Eisenerz, we prayed in the Jewish cemetery where many of the unknown victims who died on the way here were laid to rest.

October 25: We stayed overnight at the Education Center of FFWPU-Austria and drove through the Enns

Valley, which was bathed in the bright colors of autumn. One peace cyclist from Syria was especially impressed by the welcome given us by the vice mayor of the town of Reichraming when we met her at the Peace Bridge, a UPF project built in 2009 by young adults from Israel and Palestine working together.

The day ended with an invitation to the opening of the House of Remembrance in the town of St. Georgen an der Gusen, a [subcamp of Mauthausen](#).

On October 26, which is an Austrian national holiday, the Peace Road participants arrived at the quarry of the Mauthausen concentration camp.



We recalled that on April 30, 2018, Mr. Ki-seong Lee, a representative of UPF co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, offered a significant prayer here together with 150 parliamentarians and religious leaders from over 40 nations. That prayer was specifically designed to acknowledge and release the accumulated historical and spiritual resentment of victims and perpetrators associated with World War II.

After the peace cyclists arrived at the quarry, the Catholic Bishop Christine Mayr-Lumetzberger led us through a very moving memorial service. In December 2019 Bishop Mayr-Lumetzberger attended a rally in New York of the World Clergy Leadership Conference (WCLC), another organization that is affiliated with UPF. Mother Moon was the main speaker at that rally.

Afterward eight representatives laid down stones brought along from the memorials on the route of the death march. The purpose of doing this was to connect these places with the place of the liberation prayer.

A prayer was offered expressing our regret that so much suffering had been inflicted on people by people on Austrian soil.

The very last stop of the six-day Peace Road event was the City Kino cinema in the city of Steyr. The American filmmaker Joshua Sinclair, who for health reasons was unable to come in person for a talk and discussion as planned, sent a video message on the subject of remembrance. To watch that video, [click here](#).

Afterwards, four people who bicycled the entire Peace Road in the last six days gave short testimonies about their experiences on the road.

All expressed that visiting these memorial sites made them more aware of the suffering that had taken place there 75 years ago. They said that they were more concerned about coming to terms with this history and about liberation and redemption for victims and perpetrators. Our friend from Syria, in particular, said he was experiencing a feeling of liberation after the initial severity.

Peter Haider, the president of UPF-Austria, spoke about the worldwide importance of the Peace Road project. The six days ended with a few minutes of silence in which everyone could reflect on their experiences and insights and thank God for His protection. Although two cyclists had had an accident on the way, they came home healthy. Regarding the weather, we were also greatly blessed. Although intense feelings often arose because of the spiritual background, we were able to do the Peace Road event in harmony among ourselves.



We hope that a basis for further cooperation was established with mayors and active groups who are dedicated to coming to terms with history and reconciliation.

For more information on Peace Road events in Austria, [click here](#).

