



June 6, 2011

PRESS RELEASE

“Forced Labor. The Germans, the Forced Laborers and the War” – Historical exhibition from Germany opens in Moscow on the seventieth anniversary of the attack on the Soviet Union

On the seventieth anniversary of the German attack on the Soviet Union, the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation is presenting the exhibition “Forced Labor. The Germans, the Forced Laborers and the War” at the Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War in Moscow. Realized under the patronage of German Federal President Christian Wulff, the exhibition was originally initiated by the Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future” (EVZ) and carried out with its support. Apart from notables in politics and society, former forced laborers and other victims of National Socialism are also expected at the exhibition opening on June 22, 2011.

This opening marks the first instance of a historical exhibition from Germany being presented in Russia on the anniversary of the German attack. The exceptional significance of this event was summed up by Prof. Dr. Volkhard Knigge, director of the Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation, as follows: “This presentation in the Russian capital, focusing as it does on the victims of the National Socialist war of pillage and extermination, represents an important step forward in German-Russian relations and in the two countries’ joint investigation of the history of World War II.” Dr. Martin Salm, chairman of the board of directors of the EVZ foundation, stated: “I am pleased that the traveling exhibition is opening in Moscow on the anniversary of the German attack on the Soviet Union. Our concern here is primarily with paying tribute to those who have been relegated to the sidelines not only of history, but also of memory: the former forced laborers. The aim of the Foundation ‘Remembrance, Responsibility and Future’ is to save those persons from oblivion.”

The international traveling exhibition on National Socialist forced labor which opened last year at the Jewish Museum Berlin, where it drew wide public attention, will be on view in Moscow until October 23, 2011. In close cooperation with their partners at the Central Museum of the Great Patriotic War, the exhibition curators have expanded the show as well as the Russian edition of the accompanying book to include additional testimonies to the experiences of forced laborers from Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. The Russian and German partners are funding the cost of the exhibition’s presentation in Moscow jointly.

The Exhibition Contents

In National Socialist Germany, forced labor was a mass phenomenon. Workers were recruited from all parts of Europe and deployed throughout the German economy: in armament factories, on construction sites, in agriculture and the trades, in public institutions and private households. Whether a soldier in the occupying forces in the Soviet Union or a farmer’s wife in Thuringia – every German encountered forced laborers; many profited from them. Forced labor was no secret, but a crime committed in public.



The Soviet Union was hit particularly hard by this crime. Between 1941 and 1945, the German occupiers deported nearly five million men, women and children from there to the German Reich for forced labor. Millions more were put to work in the occupied areas of the Soviet Union to support the Germans in the conduct of war.

Among the Soviet forced laborers in the German Reich were not only so-called “Eastern workers” – civilians – but also nearly two million prisoners of war and several hundred thousand concentration camp inmates. The forced laborers from the Soviet Union were on the very lowest rung of the NS racial hierarchy, and were treated accordingly by their German employers. In many cases, the suffering of the Soviet forced laborers did not end with their liberation in May 1945. They were regarded collaborationists by the Stalinist leadership in Moscow, and a considerable number of them were once again committed to camps. It was only after the Soviet Union’s dissolution that the history and hardships of the forced laborers were fully recognized and honored – not only in the USSR successor countries, but also in Germany. Not until 2000 did the federal German government and the German industry acknowledge their historical responsibility by establishing the Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future”, thus paving the way for the payment of financial aid to onetime forced laborers from the former Soviet Union and many other countries.

The exhibition being presented in Moscow is likewise an expression of the unconditional recognition and tribute now paid former forced laborers. It is the first to recount the entire history of the crime of forced labor and its post-1945 consequences. In the process, it shows that forced labor was an integral part of the racist social order of the NS state from the beginning. The propagated “people’s community” consisting of members of the German “master race” and the performance of forced labor by the persons of supposedly inferior races – the two went hand in hand. The commonplaceness of forced labor and the widespread participation of society in the forced labor system mirrored the racist nature of National Socialism.

The exhibition places a special focus on the history of the relationship between Germans and forced laborers. Every German had to decide for him- or herself how to encounter forced laborers: with a last vestige of humanity, or with the supposedly imperative, racist-motivated coldness and inexorability of a member of an allegedly superior people.

More than sixty representative case histories form the core of the exhibition. Like the documents and photographs on display, these case histories are the result of meticulous research carried out in archives in Europe, the U.S. and Israel. They range thematically from the humiliating work performed by victims of political persecution in Chemnitz to the grueling slave labor of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union and everyday life in the context of forced labor on a farm in Lower Austria.

Detailed information on the contents and focuses of the exhibition, information updates, and a press section with photos, interview contacts and information on purchasing the accompanying book can be found at www.ausstellung-zwangsarbeit.org.

Press contact:

Philipp Neumann
Head of Press and Publicity
Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials Foundation
+49 (0) 36 43 430156
pneumann@buchenwald.de