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Lord Major, Mr. Burkhard Jung
Prof. Dr. Dieter Ingenschay, Director of the Institute of Languages
and Literatures of the Humboldt University in Berlin
Prof. Dr. Klaus Meyer-Minnemann of the University of Hamburg,
Prof. Dr. Alfonso de Toro,
Dr. Claudia Gatzemeier
Distinguished Ambassadors,
Dear colleagues and friends. **Good evening,**

It is my great honor and pleasure to be here today, at the University of Leipzig, representing the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the celebration of the twentieth anniversary of the Ibero-American Research Center of the University of Leipzig. In the first place, I want to convey the special greetings and congratulations of the authorities of my university, Prof. Dr. Menahem Ben Sasson, President of the Hebrew University and Prof. Dr. Asher Cohen, Rector of the Hebrew University.

Our two universities—the University of Leipzig and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem—, have developed by now a long and fruitful tradition of collaboration in several academic levels already for many years. This important cooperation was possible thanks to the ongoing academic work and partnership with the Ibero-American Research Center of the University of Leipzig.

Indeed, we are acquainted with Ibero-American Research Center for already more than fifteen years. Our first common project was the International Conference "Borges in Jerusalem", held at the Hebrew University in 1999, in which Prof. Dr. Alfonso de Toro was the keynote speaker and from which an important publication in the series of the Centre resulted. Since then we had the privilege to collaborate with the Ibero-American Research Center in several international research projects, workshops, conferences, student exchange and important publications. This collaboration was not only with the Department of Romance and Latin American Studies which I directed, but in an institutional level too, since the Hebrew University has developed a close cooperation with the Ibero-American Research Center through its various Institutes (the Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace, the European Forum, the Melton Center, the DAAD Center for German Studies, the Koebner

Center, and others). The Hebrew University is proud of this academic partnership with the Ibero-American Research Center of the University of Leipzig in so many and different academic venues and looks forward to continue this scientific and intellectual dialogue and cooperation, and to intensify it in the future.

One of the many examples of this collaboration was the research project “New Diasporas within Globalization”. The proposal was submitted to the German Bundesministerium für Bildung und Forschung – BMBF and won the call, resulting in extremely important academic workshops in Leipzig in 2011, and in Jerusalem in 2012. This was a far-sighted project, of broad academic and research scope; it has made significant advances in the research of crucially important questions. Responding to the trans-disciplinary or cross-disciplinary vision of the Ibero-American Research Center of the Univ. of Leipzig, this project has contributed to the dialogue within the Mediterranean region and between this region and Europe, generating a dynamic exchange between the Humanities and the social sciences, while leaving a significant space for comparative and also historical perspective. Moreover, the project made a substantial contribution to a new perspective and understanding of concepts and ideas related to the coexistence of cultures.

From this project two major international projects are being now jointly developed that will undoubtedly have a great scientific and societal impact. One of them has been recently submitted as Horizon 2020 project, coordinated by the Ibero-American Research Center of the University of Leipzig under the direction of Prof. Dr. Alfonso de Toro. The project dealing on Migrations and Diasporas is a ground breaking project that counts with the participation of the Hebrew University and of eight other leading universities in the world. This is only one of the numerous examples of innovative projects of the Center.

Due to my close and long term acquaintance and knowledge of the Ibero-American Research Center, I have witnessed its unquestionable international academic level and the impact of its research in Europe, the Americas, North Africa and the Middle East. The projects, international conferences, pioneering publications, the dozens of young talented researchers that graduated with outstanding Ph.D. dissertations, all of this can be regarded as a model of excellence in the academic world, and their repercussion in the

academic field is of utmost relevance, all of which is undoubtedly a source of pride for the University of Leipzig and for the German academic milieu as a whole.

In spite of all said, I understand that the University of Leipzig is considering changes and reductions at the Center and at the the Institute of Romance Languages and Literatures. I want to express my concern regarding this plan that can affect the excellence of this prestigious Institute and Center and its important academic activity. Such a successful Institute needs to be reinforced in order to enhance its competitiveness and crucial international impact and that of the university of Leipzig.

Certainly so, the Ibero-American Centre of the University of Leipzig has largely contributed to the internationalization not only of the University of Leipzig but of the city of Leipzig as well. This is apparent by the visits of leading political, cultural and intellectual personalities, by the support that the Center receives from prestigious universities and personalities all over the world, including the diplomatic representatives of Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula, but mostly by its research excellence that in various levels has changed epistemological and research paradigms not only for Ibero-American Studies but also for the contemporary cultural theories.

For all this reasons, on behalf of the Hebrew University and on my behalf, I would like to express our joy of being part of this celebration, manifesting our strongest esteem towards this Research Center of excellence, admired and recognized as one of the best in the whole academic world. I want to convey my utmost appreciation and gratitude to Prof. Dr. de Toro, co-founder and first director of the Center, for being the visionary, impellor and leading scholar of the Center. I take the opportunity to congratulate him on the latest honor awarded to him, nominated Member Correspondent of the Chilean Academy of the Language. It is a privilege for the University of Leipzig to count with such an outstanding and world renowned scholar.

I also want to thank and congratulate Dr. Claudia Gatzemeier, co-director of the Center and Dr. Rene Ceballos, for their excellent work on behalf of this institution and last but not least to firmly encourage the authorities of the Univ. of Leipzig to support this Center of academic excellence of which they have to be so proud of.

I look forward to its further intense activity and development in the next years. The academic Ibero-American world is strongly relying on it. The Hebrew university will be more than happy to continue to take part in the enlargement and progress of this remarkable endeavor. Thank you.