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President Bill Clinton to Keynote Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center Public Grand Opening April 19, 2009

Former U.S. President to join Governor Quinn and thousands of guests as local Holocaust survivors Witness their Dream Revealed for the first time

SKOKIE, IL – Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center leadership today announced that President Bill Clinton will be the featured speaker at the institution's highly anticipated Public Grand Opening on Sunday, April 19, 2009 in Skokie, Illinois. President Clinton will join Illinois Governor Pat Quinn, foreign dignitaries, Holocaust survivors and several thousand members of the general public as the new museum officially opens its doors for the first time.

Likely the last international institution of its type to be built with the active participation of Holocaust survivors, the Illinois Holocaust Museum will be the largest institution in the Midwest dedicated to preserving the memories of those lost in the Holocaust and to teaching current generations to fight hatred, indifference and genocide in today's world.

"President Clinton's participation in the dedication of this world-class institution truly sets the tone for what we want the museum to be," said Richard S. Hirschhaut, the museum's executive director. "Not only does President Clinton's attendance underscore the urgency of our mission, but also the important role we must all play in combating intolerance and genocide throughout the world today."

The Public Grand Opening Ceremony is free and open to the public; however, tickets are required and can be requested online at www.ilholocaustmuseum.org. Tickets are limited and must be requested by Monday, April 6, 2009.

Opening day festivities will commence at 12:00 p.m. under a grand tent outside the museum building, located at 9603 Woods Drive in Skokie, Illinois. In addition to remarks by President Clinton, clergy and other elected leaders, the program will include a video presentation, ceremonial lighting of candles by survivors of past and contemporary genocides, a special performance by Grammy Award Winning violinist Miri Ben-Ari, a performance by the Soul Children of Chicago and more. Public tours of the building will follow the dedication ceremony beginning at approximately 2:00 p.m. utilizing a timed-ticket entry system. Scheduled times for hourly museum tours will be assigned on a first-come, first-served basis, upon arrival with a valid ticket. Timed tickets not used will be good for one free afternoon admission to the museum during the month of May, Tuesday – Friday after 1 p.m. and Saturday – Sunday between 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. Parking for the opening ceremony will be available at an offsite location.

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“President Clinton is a hugely influential international figure whose administration brought peace to Northern Ireland and to the Balkans,” said J.B. Pritzker, the museum’s capital campaign chairman. “His participation in the grand opening of the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center is a tremendous symbol of the global significance this institution aims to have.”

In 1993, President Clinton spoke at the dedication ceremony for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C.

Beyond the atrocities of Nazi Germany, the new museum takes a global perspective by exploring issues of genocide and human rights around the world and throughout history. Through its public programs, traveling exhibits and *Voices of Conscience* lecture series featuring international human rights leaders, the museum will work to raise awareness of and inspire action in response to the many atrocities that have taken place and continue to occur worldwide. To reinforce the international significance the institution will hold, The Honorable Colin L. Powell will deliver the keynote address at the institution’s Inaugural Gala on April 2, when the museum will officially begin its countdown to opening day.

As part of the Illinois Holocaust Museum’s grand opening weekend, it will also be hosting an Interfaith Leadership Breakfast on Friday, April 17, where Eboo Patel, founder and executive director of the Interfaith Youth Core, will speak and clergy from across the region will come to participate in a common prayer for humanity. To showcase its thoughtful, provocative education center, the museum will also host a symposium on Monday, April 20 themed, *The Ethics of Dealing with Genocide: Media and Legal Perspectives on Genocide Awareness and Prevention*. The symposium will examine the role and responsibility of the media in covering genocide, as well as recent developments in atrocity crimes currently on trial. Members of the media, as well as national and international leaders who have fought and continue to fight injustice are among those confirmed to participate in the event which will be attended by a broad cross-section of educators, thought leaders and student journalists from the greater Chicagoland area.

“This museum is a dream come true for local Holocaust survivors,” said Samuel Harris, Holocaust survivor and museum board president. “It is our legacy. It will impart our stories of survival and the lessons of the Holocaust, but more importantly, it will teach future generations the dangers of unchallenged hate to ensure that “Never Again” becomes a reality.”

The Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center will reach approximately 250,000 schoolchildren throughout Illinois and across the Midwest annually. Issues related to Darfur, Rwanda, Cambodia and other modern atrocities will be carefully integrated into museum exhibits, curricula, and field trip experiences. Learning materials will also be made available to teachers to integrate into their own curricula. In Illinois, specifically, students are required by law to learn about the Holocaust and other genocides; the new museum will help fulfill this mandate.

Designed by award-winning architect Stanley Tigerman, the \$45 million, 65,000 square foot facility, houses extraordinary artifacts, including Simon Wiesenthal’s eyeglasses and the original schoolhouse-style desk that he brought with him from his hometown of Linz, Austria to Vienna, an original volume of the Nuremberg Trial transcripts, Kindertransport lists and artwork made in the concentration camps. An award-winning collection of 250 letters, postcards, postal documents, leaflets and other materials documenting the Nazis’ annihilation of those they

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deemed “undesirable” will also be on display, along with an early 20th Century German rail car of the type used by the Nazis during the Holocaust to transport millions to concentration camps and, ultimately, their deaths. And, more than 2,000 testimonies of Midwest Holocaust survivors recorded by the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation Institute for Visual History and Education, founded by Steven Spielberg, are accessible in the museum’s interactive resource center.

The museum also features a *Legacy of Absence Gallery* that is home to a permanent collection of visual artwork by distinguished contemporary artists from around the world that reflect on historical violence. Its *Room of Remembrance* honors the memory of Holocaust victims and contains the inscribed names of nearly 1,300 people on walls rising 25 feet, enveloping the visitor in a sacred moment of remembrance. Its *Hall of Reflection*, bathed in natural light, provides a space for quiet contemplation surrounded by eighteen window bays each containing an element through which candles of hope can be ceremonially lit. And, its interactive youth exhibition introduces children to the lessons of the Holocaust in an age-appropriate manner helping the younger visitor to investigate how to be a responsible citizen, take care of oneself and speak up for others.

The Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center is ideally situated in Skokie because of the Village’s connection to the Holocaust. After the War, Skokie became an enclave for many survivors and was the location of an attempt by neo-Nazis to march through the community in the late 1970s. A permit was first requested by the Nationalist Socialist Party of America to march in Skokie's Birch Park in October 1977 and ultimately led to a hearing before the U.S. Supreme Court.

The Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center is a project of the Holocaust Memorial Foundation of Illinois. Founded by Holocaust survivors nearly 30 years ago, the organization is dedicated to teaching about the Holocaust and the dangers of unchallenged hate. The organization has taught school and community groups through a small storefront museum and speakers’ bureau since 1981. To learn more, visit www.ilholocaustmuseum.org.

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