



# Berlin & International Law

A SELF-GUIDED CITY TOUR

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## Berlin: City of International Law

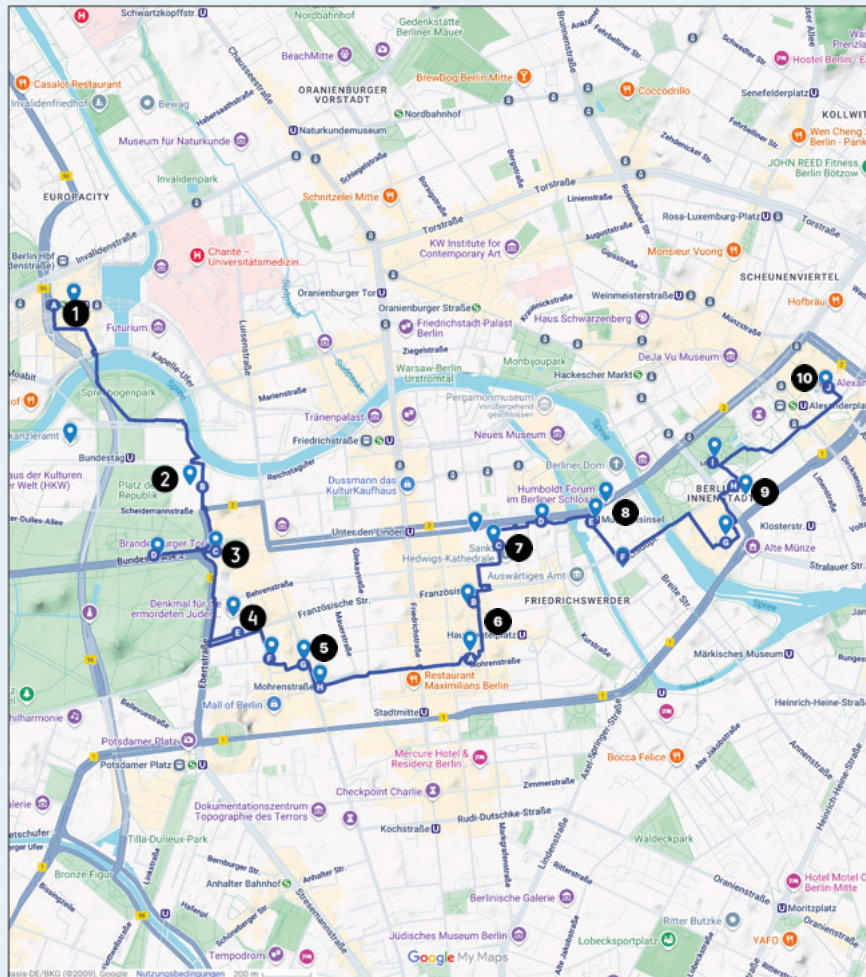
Welcome to this international law themed tour guide to Berlin - a city that shaped and was shaped by international law like few others. It was here that German governments decided to start two world wars and coordinated the Holocaust. And it was here that the adversaries of the Cold War faced each other until the East Berliners brought down the Berlin Wall on the night of 9 November 1989.

Today, Berlin is the capital of a nation that considers the promotion of international law to be part of its historical responsibility. While Germany remains one of the largest donors to the UN and other international organizations, some argue the ongoing war in Gaza puts Berlin's commitment to the international rule of law to the test.

Against this background, this guide introduces you to a small selection of Berlin's most prominent international law related places, buildings and persons such as the **Reichstag**, the **Brandenburg Gate** or the **Holocaust Memorial**. In addition to the ten featured stops, you will encounter subtler traces of international law throughout the city: **bullet holes** from the 1945 'Battle for Berlin' still visible in many older buildings (A), **'stumbling stones'** (Stolpersteine) in Berlin's pavements commemorating victims of Nazi persecution (B), and the double row of **cobblestones** marking the course of the Berlin Wall (C).

This guide is brought to you by the **Museum of International Law**. You can find more information about the Museum on the final page.

We warmly invite you to visit us in person or online!



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Scan the code for precise locations and directions!



A: Bullet-holes, Geschwister-Scholl-Straße 5 (© GoogleMaps 2022).



B: Stolperstein, Paul-Lincke-Ufer 41 (© Georg Slickers 2005).



C: Berlin Wall marked by cobblestones (© Georg Slickers 2005).



## 1

## Berlin Central Station

Our tour begins at Berlin's Central Station (*Hauptbahnhof*). The station opened in May 2006 on the site of a former train station: *Lehrter Bahnhof*. You can still see the inscription 'Lehrter Bahnhof' on some of the station signs.

Lehrter Bahnhof was inaugurated by Kaiser Wilhelm I in 1871 - the same year the German Empire was founded. It soon became Berlin's most important train station and the backdrop for several notable events.

On June 3, 1905, Duchess Cecilie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin arrived at Lehrter Bahnhof ahead of her wedding to Crown Prince Wilhelm of Prussia. Cecilienhof Palace in Potsdam, named after her, was the site of the Potsdam Conference in July–August 1945. There, Allied leaders - Winston Churchill (later replaced by Clement Attlee), Harry S. Truman, and Joseph Stalin - met to determine the postwar order in Europe following Germany's defeat in World War II.

Back to Lehrter Bahnhof: In August 1914, soldiers departed from here to the frontlines of World War I and four years later, in November 1918, sailors from Kiel and Wilhelmshaven arrived at the station to support the revolution that led to the overthrow of the German Empire.

In 1937, Mussolini departed from Lehrter Bahnhof after meeting Hitler in Berlin. In May 1945, Martin Bormann, Hitler's private secretary, killed himself near the station while fleeing Soviet forces. His remains were only discovered decades later. Partially destroyed during the war, the station resumed service under British control in June 1945. Many German prisoners of war returned to Berlin via Lehrter Bahnhof in 1945-1946.

Lehrter Bahnhof was demolished in the late 1950s, and the site remained unused until construction of the new Hauptbahnhof began in the early 2000s.



Sign at Berlin Central Station with inscription 'Lehrter Bahnhof' (© Berliner Fahrgastverband IGEB).



Departure hall of Lehrter Bahnhof in 1879.



Cecilie of Mecklenburg-Schwerin.



Benito Mussolini departs from Lehrter Bahnhof after meeting Adolf Hitler (© Keystone Press 1937).



Return of German prisoners of war in 1946 (© Bundesarchiv, B 145 Bild-P029343).



## 2

## Government District

The *Reichstagsgebäude* in Berlin's government district (*Regierungsviertel*), which houses the German Parliament (*Bundestag*), has played a pivotal role in shaping international law and world politics. During the Weimar Republic, the Reichstag was the site of democratic experiments that influenced post-war Germany's constitution and later democratic institutions worldwide.

The Reichstag fire of 1933 marked a turning point in German and, subsequently, world history. The German government blamed the fire on communist agitators and instrumentalised it to justify dismantling democratic structures via the Enabling Act (*Ermächtigungsgesetz*), paving the way for totalitarian rule. Policies and decisions taken by politicians and civil servants in Germany's government district caused and shaped two world wars and ultimately led to the Holocaust.

During Germany's separation into East and West (1945-1990), the government district lay mostly dormant. After reunification, it regained prominence as the nerve centre of Germany's international legal decision-making, steered from the newly built Federal Chancellery (*Bundeskanzleramt*) - considered the world's largest government headquarters.

While Germany remains a strong supporter of the UN and other organizations, some argue the German government's stance on the Middle East conflict has called Berlin's commitment to the international rule of law into question.



*Bundeskanzleramt* (right) and Swiss embassy (left) seen from Central Station (© S. Bergmann, CC BY-SA 2.0).



*Reichstag* building ca. 1894.



Top: Heavily damaged Reichstag building in 1945 (© National WWII Museum, New Orleans).

Left: The Reichstag building on fire on 27 February 1933 (© Bundesarchiv, 183-R99859).



December 1989: Berlin Wall behind Reichstag shortly after the Toppling of the Wall (© Alexander Mayer).



## 3

## Brandenburg Gate - 17th of June Street

The Brandenburg Gate, completed in 1791, was commissioned by King Frederick William II in 1788 and inspired by Athens' *Propylaea*. Named for marking the road to the city of Brandenburg, it is crowned by a *quadriga* - four horses pulling a chariot steered by a goddess. Originally, this goddess was intended to represent *Eirene*, the Greek goddess of peace. After the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), she was redesigned as *Victoria*, the goddess of victory, and equipped with an Iron Cross surmounted by a crowned Prussian Eagle.

The Brandenburg Gate marks the eastern end of 17<sup>th</sup> of June Street (*Straße des 17. Juni*). Established in 1697, the street has long been an important thoroughfare in Berlin. In the 1920s, Wernher von Braun (who later created the V-2, the world's first long-range ballistic missile) tested rocket-powered vehicles (*Raketenwagen*) here. Later, Adolf Hitler envisioned it as the central East-West axis of 'Germania', the new capital planned by his architect, Albert Speer.

About 200 meters in front of the gate stands the bronze sculpture named 'The Caller' (*Der Rufer*). Inscribed on the sculpture is a quote by the Italian poet Francesco Petrarca: "I walk through the world and cry: Peace, peace, peace." Installed at its current location in May 1989, just months before the fall of the Berlin Wall, the sculpture is meant to be a timeless call for peace. Another cast of The Caller is located in Perth, Australia, where the sculpture calls for the remembrance of torture victims.

The name of the street itself - 17<sup>th</sup> of June Street - commemorates the East German uprising of 17 June 1953 when workers protested against the German communist regime. Soviet tanks crushed the revolt, resulting in dozens of deaths. The event influenced Cold War dynamics, prompting discussions on human rights and reinforcing the division of Germany. Until Germany's reunification in 1990, June 17 was a national holiday in West Germany.



French Emperor Napoleon I triumphantly enters Berlin on 27 October 1806 (Charles Meynier 1810).



17<sup>th</sup> of June Street as East-West-Axis.



June 1953 uprising in Leipzig (© Bundesarchiv, B 285 Bild-14676).



Sculpture of 'The Caller' facing the Brandenburg Gate in August 1989 (© Jérôme Laval). Notice the empty wreath of *Victoria* on the gate: After World War II, the East German authorities removed the Iron Cross and Prussian Eagle as they were considered to be militaristic symbols. Both were restored in 1990.



## 4

## Holocaust Memorial

The 'Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe' commemorates the 6 million Jews killed by the German people under Adolf Hitler's leadership. It was inaugurated on May 10, 2005, 60 years after the end of World War II in Europe and consists of 2,711 concrete stelae designed by architect Peter Eisenman.

The memorial aims to serve both as a place of mourning and as a warning, reminding visitors of the horrors that follow when human rights and the rule of law are abandoned. The Holocaust became a catalyst for the creation of key international legal instruments such as the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1948 Genocide Convention.

The memorial's location is historically charged. It occupies part of the grounds of the villa of Nazi Germany's Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels. The memorial also lies in immediate proximity to the former locations of Germany's Reich Chancellery and of the *Führerbunker*. Completed in 1944 as an air-raid shelter for Adolf Hitler and his inner circle, the *Führerbunker* was the site of the regime's collapse and Hitler's suicide on 30 April 1945. Today, the bunker is sealed, covered by a carpark, and marked only by an inconspicuous information panel nearby.

While initially controversial, most now agree that the memorial succeeds in honouring the victims of the Holocaust. Yet some argue the memorial does not sufficiently address the responsibility of those millions of Germans who carried out, enabled, or failed to stop the genocide. They contend that remembrance is incomplete without confronting the guilt of the perpetrators and that engaging with this responsibility is essential in order to prevent such atrocities in the future.



Holocaust Memorial in 2016. Reichstag and US Embassy in the background (© Alexander Blum 2016).



Top: Rear entrance to the *Führerbunker* in the garden of the Reich Chancellery 1945 (© Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-V04744).

Left: View between the stelae. The narrow alleys between the stelae and the uneven ground are intended to create a sense of instability and disorientation (© Michael Coghlan 2016).



The site of Adolf Hitler's *Führerbunker* in close proximity to the Holocaust Memorial is nowadays covered by a carpark (© GoogleMaps 2025). Note the *Wilhelmstraße* to the right. Because many government ministries were located here during the Nazi era, one of the *Subsequent Nuremberg Trials* administered by the US - officially the *Ministries Trial* (1948-49) - is often referred to in German as the *Wilhelmstraßen-Prozess*.

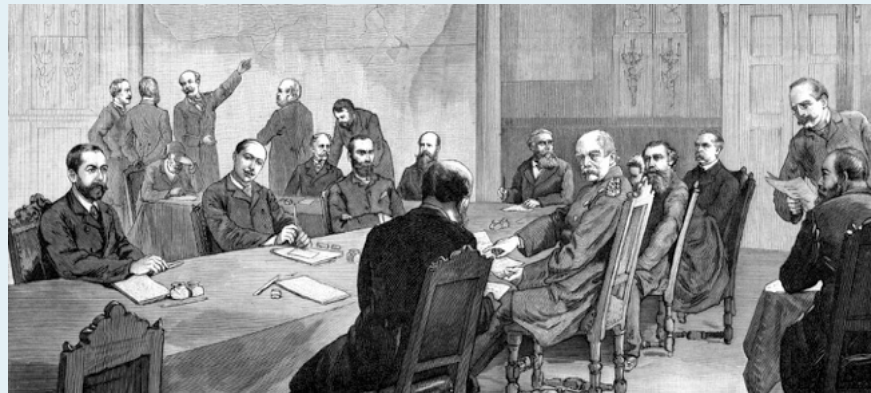


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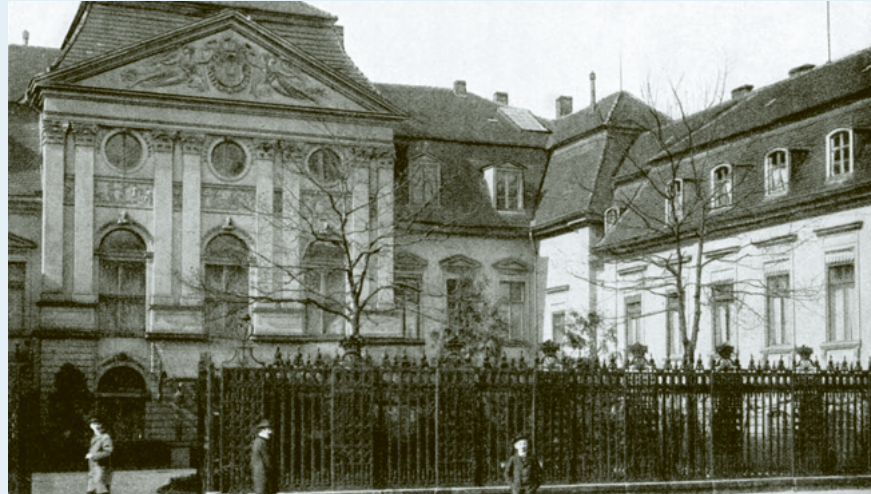
## Berlin Congo Conference 1884-1885

Outside of Wilhelmstraße 92, an information panel recalls a chapter of Germany's past which receives comparatively little attention. In 1884 German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck convened the Berlin Congo Conference here at the Reich Chancellery to discuss trade along the Congo and Niger rivers. The resulting *General Act of the Berlin Conference* formalised European claims in Africa. The conference legitimised imperial expansion, fuelled the 'Scramble for Africa', and ignored the rights and sovereignty of indigenous peoples, shaping a legacy of exploitation that, some argue, continues to this day.

The fact that a street and sub-way station near Wilhelmstraße bore the name *Mohrenstraße* until July 2025 indicates that Germany is still struggling to come to terms with its colonial past. In German, the term 'Mohr' refers to Black people in a stereotypical, exoticised, and discriminatory way. Since 18 July 2025, the street's name is Anton-Wilhelm-Amo-Straße. Anton W. Amo (1703-1759) was 'brought' to Germany from the Dutch Gold Coast (now Ghana) by the Dutch West India Company in 1707. He went on to become the first African academic to receive a doctorate from a German university.



An illustration of the Berlin Congo Conference in 1884 (A. V. Röbber, November 1884).



The Reich Chancellery in Wilhelmstraße in October 1895.



Sub-way station in *Mohrenstraße* (© Tony Webster, 19 September 2014).



Protest in favour of renaming *Mohrenstraße* on 23 August 2015, the International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition (© Saliva Glance).



## 6

## Gendarmenmarkt

*Gendarmenmarkt*, often considered one of Berlin's most elegant squares, was created in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century during the city's baroque expansion under Elector Frederick III, later King Frederick I of Prussia. Its name derives from the *Gens d'armes*, a Prussian cuirassier regiment once stationed nearby. Over the centuries, the square has hosted markets, military parades, political demonstrations, and cultural festivals, all framed by the neoclassical *Konzerthaus*: the French Cathedral and the German Cathedral. The two churches are cathedrals in name only since neither is or was the seat of a bishop.

The French Cathedral was built from 1701 by and for the Huguenots, French Protestants who sought refuge in Prussia after fleeing persecution in France. Following the 1685 Edict of Potsdam (issued by Frederick William, Elector of Brandenburg), thousands of Huguenots were welcomed to Berlin. They brought with them skilled trades, business networks, and cultural influences that shaped the city's growth. The edict granted them rights to worship, work, and own property - a precursor to principles found in modern asylum and refugee law. Their story connects the square's history to enduring global debates about human rights and the protection of displaced peoples.

The German Cathedral, completed in 1708, played a key role during the March Revolution of 1848, when citizens fighting for liberal reforms and national unity clashed with Prussian troops. The cathedral temporarily housed the bodies of over 200 victims, making the square a symbol of mourning and resistance in Berlin's and Germany's struggle for democracy.

Today, *Gendarmenmarkt* maintains a quiet link to themes related to international law since it is home to the Berlin office of the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law (at *Markgrafenstrasse* 37).



Reception of Huguenot refugees by the Great Elector at Potsdam Palace in 1686 (Hugo Vogel 1885).



'Laying out the March Dead', a painting by Adolph Menzel, 1848. The painting depicts a crowd gathered on Berlin's *Gendarmenmarkt*, attending the laying in state of civilians who died during the March Revolution of 1848. Menzel himself was present at the ceremony and captured the event firsthand.



## 7

## Bebelplatz

*Bebelplatz* sits on the site of the city's fortifications built after the Thirty Years' War. The location of the old fortifications can still be deduced from the trees lining the *Unter den Linden* boulevard which end at Bebelplatz, where the city's walls once stood. Between 1741 and 1743, under King Frederick II, the area was laid out as the 'Square at the Opera House' (*Platz am Opernhaus*).

The square is infamous as the site of the 10 May 1933 book burnings, organized by the German Student Association. Around 70,000 students, professors, and SA and SS members burned books labeled 'un-German', including works by Gina Kaus, Vera Inber, Nelly Sachs, Anna Seghers, Bertha von Suttner, Lisa Tetzner, Rosa Luxemburg, and Heinrich Mann.

In 1947, after the end of World War II, the square (then located in East Berlin) was named after August Bebel. He was a German socialist leader and co-founder of the Social Democratic Party ('SPD') known for advocating workers' rights, gender equality, and social reform. He highlighted the role of international legal norms in protecting workers, promoting equal rights for foreigners, and resolving conflicts through international arbitration.

The adjacent Old Library (*Alte Bibliothek*) burned down during World War II and was rebuilt from 1963-1969. It now houses Humboldt University's Faculty of Law - the law faculty where Germany's current judge at the International Court of Justice, Georg Nolte, taught before his United Nations appointment.

Not far from Bebelplatz, on the way to Museum Island, stands the Crown Prince's Palace (*Kronprinzenpalais*). On August 31, 1990, representatives from East and West Germany signed the 'Unification Treaty' here. The treaty laid the legal groundwork for the reunification of the two German states at midnight on October 3, 1990.



Bebelplatz (then called *Opernplatz*) ca. 1880. The square has remained largely unchanged since then.



Students burn 'un-German' writings and books on *Opernplatz* (© Bundesarchiv 102-14597 / Georg Pahl).



'The Empty Library' (M. Ullman, 1995) commemorates the 1933 book burning (© Charlotte Nordahl).



*Kronprinzenpalais* - site of the signing of the 1990 German Unification Treaty - ca. 1900.

## 8

## Museum Island &amp; Berlin Palace

Berlin's Museum Island (*Museumsinsel*) is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that has evolved into a focal point for debates on cultural restitution and colonial legacies. Established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the island was developed to house Prussia's growing art collections, culminating in five major museums: the Old Museum, New Museum, Old National Gallery, Bode Museum, and Pergamon Museum.

These institutions showcase artifacts from ancient civilizations, many of which were acquired during periods of colonial expansion and retained despite requests for their return. Since the first display of the New Museum's 'Nefertiti Bust' in 1924, for example, Egypt has consistently requested the bust's return. Similarly, efforts to return the 'Pergamon Altar' to Türkiye have been unsuccessful.

To the east of Museum Island stands the reconstructed Berlin Palace (*Berliner Stadtschloss*). The palace was the main residence of Prussian Kings and German Emperors from 1443-1918. The palace was heavily damaged in World War II and demolished by East Germany in 1950. In the 1970s, East Germany constructed the Palace of the Republic here, which housed the East German Parliament.

After Germany's reunification in 1990, plans to demolish the Palace of the Republic and to reconstruct the *Stadtschloss* sparked heated debate. Supporters argued that such action would restore an architectural landmark and reconnect Berlin with its cultural heritage. Critics contended that rebuilding the palace amounted to celebrating a symbol of violent imperial power and erased East Germany's history. Eventually, the supporters prevailed and the new palace was opened in 2020.

The palace is now home to the Humboldt Forum. The Humboldt Forum houses inter alia the Ethnological Museum of Berlin. Since 2022, the museum has returned a number of objects to Namibia, Nigeria, and Tanzania.



Altar to Zeus in the Pergamon Museum (© Jan Mehlich 2007).



Nefertiti Bust, New Museum (© Philip Pikart 2009).



The Palace of the Republic (© Denis Apel 2005).



Top: The so-called 'Karl-Liebknecht-Portal' of the State Council building in Berlin is one of the few surviving original parts of the Berlin Palace. From the portal's balcony socialist and communist Karl Liebknecht proclaimed the 'Socialist Republic' on 9 November 1918 (© Ansgar Koreng 2015).



Left: Plaque depicting a king (oba) and four attendants, 16<sup>th</sup> century, III C 8208. Ownership transferred to Nigeria in 2022 (© Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum / Claudia Obrocki).



9

## St. Nicholas Church & Red City Hall

The *Nikolaikirche*, Berlin's oldest church (dating from about 1220), is of particular interest to international lawyers since it is the final resting place of Samuel von Pufendorf (1632-1694). Pufendorf argued that natural law, rooted in human sociability rather than divine command, should govern relations between states - an early vision of an international order based on law rather than power alone. After Germany's reunification in 1990, *Nikolaikirche* also briefly served as the meeting place for Berlin's newly reunified parliament.

Not far from *Nikolaikirche* stands the Red City Hall (*Rotes Rathaus*), built between 1861 and 1869 in a Northern-Italian Renaissance style. Its long terracotta frieze was added in the late 1870s. Relief number 29 illustrates the return of the Brandenburg Gate's quadriga: taken to Paris by French Emperor Napoleon I in 1806 and triumphantly returned to Berlin in 1814 after his defeat and abdication.

Opposite the city hall's main entrance, lies the Neptune Fountain, conceived by Reinhold Begas and completed in 1891. Neptune presides over four female figures symbolizing the major rivers of Prussia - the Rhine, Elbe, Oder, and Vistula. Today, the Vistula (German: *Weichsel*; Polish: *Wisła*) no longer runs through Germany but is Poland's longest river. The figure of the Vistula on the Neptune Fountain is thus a reminder of the territorial changes following the end of World War II.



Detail of the Red City Hall's façade with terracotta relief number 29, which depicts the return of the Brandenburg Gate's quadriga (© Manfred Brückels 2009).



War-damaged *Nikolaikirche* in 1982 (© Ulrich Waack).



*Nikolaikirche* 1983 (© Ulrich Waack).



The main entrance of the Red City Hall (© GoogleMaps 2024). Note the Ukrainian flags lining the building.



Figure representing the river Vistula on Neptune Fountain in front of the Red City Hall (© Jorge Royan 2007).



10

## Alexanderplatz

Berlin's *Alexanderplatz* is named after Russian Tsar Alexander I in honour of the tsar's visit to Berlin in 1805. Initially a market square, it evolved into a central hub for commerce, politics, and public gatherings. In 1904, the department store chain Hertie (originally named '*Hermann Tietz*') opened a branch at Alexanderplatz. In the 1930s, Hertie's Jewish owners (the Tietz family) were forced out of the company. The main beneficiary of Hertie's 'Aryanisation' was its employee Georg Karg, who took over the Tietz's shares and responsibilities. After the war, he founded the Karg Family Foundation, later renamed the Hertie Foundation. Today, it runs Berlin's Hertie School.

Located within the former East Berlin, Alexanderplatz underwent significant transformation between 1949 and 1990. Following the example of Moscow's Red Square, Alexanderplatz was remodelled so as to be able to serve as a venue for army parades. The Fountain of Friendship between Peoples was erected in 1970. The concept of Friendship between Peoples (*Völkerfreundschaft*) was coined by Joseph Stalin to describe the political and cultural relations between the Soviet republics.

In 1969, the World Clock, which displays the current time for 148 cities around the world, was installed on Alexanderplatz. When the world clock was refurbished in 1997, twenty cities that East German authorities omitted for political reasons, including Tel Aviv, Cape Town and Seoul, were added. In addition, despite diplomatic protests from Slovakia, the name of its capital, Bratislava, was replaced with the German name '*Pressburg*'.

A pivotal moment in Alexanderplatz's history occurred on 4 November 1989, when up to 500,000 people gathered for a peaceful demonstration against the East German regime. The demonstration was instrumental to the 1989 Peaceful Revolution, leading to the toppling of the Berlin Wall by East Berliners only five days later.



Hertie on Alexanderplatz 1936 (© FOTO:FORTEPAN / Lőrincze Judit).



World Clock 1970 (© Jörg Blobeit).



Top: May 1945 - destroyed Hertie store to the right (© Yevgeny Khaldei).  
Left: Fountain of Friendship between Peoples on 16 April 1972  
(© Bundesarchiv, Bild 183-L0416-0003).



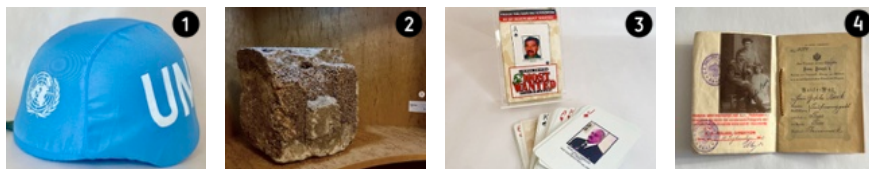
Demonstration on Alexanderplatz on 4 November 1989 (© Süddeutsche Zeitung Photo).



# The Museum of International Law

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The Museum of International Law in Lund displays objects and tells stories that show how international law affects the lives of ordinary human beings. Our museum is a place of **learning** and of **research**: we use our collection to explain abstract legal norms to visiting members of the university, high school students and decision-makers, and we study and reflect on international law by engaging critically with our objects and by making them available to the community of international legal scholars. The museum is also a place of **conversation and creativity**: we bring together visiting scholars, artists, students, and contemporary witnesses to discuss current affairs and identify avenues to tackle the challenges of our time together.



Each object in our collection tells a story about international law and human rights. Examples include a UN blue helmet (1), a piece of the Berlin Wall (2), a card game played by US forces during the 2003 Iraq War (3), or a passport of a family of the extinct Austro-Hungarian Empire (4).

You can find more information about the museum team, explore a small selection of our objects, and other tour guides, on our website at: [www.internationallawmuseum.org](http://www.internationallawmuseum.org)  
If you would like to suggest objects or an event for our museum, please contact us at [contact@internationallawmuseum.org](mailto:contact@internationallawmuseum.org)



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This guide was created by Valentin Jeutner, Associate Professor of International Law at Lund University and director of the Museum of International Law. Berlin is the author's home town. Charlie Guerit provided editorial assistance.