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## PRESS RELEASE

# Leipzig's Festival of Lights Commemorates 35 Years of Peaceful Revolution

(30 August 2024) Candles were the symbol of the Peaceful Revolution in the autumn of 1989, which began in Leipzig. Candles and light will therefore also be at the centre of the remembrance on 9 October 2024. Leipzig is dedicating an outstanding programme to the 35th anniversary of the Peaceful Revolution. To mark the occasion, the Leipzig Festival of Lights will take place on 9 October 2024 from 7 pm to midnight along the entire inner city ring road - the authentic demonstration route. For the first time all light projects can be experienced in a virtual tour in German and English in the Explore Leipzig app.

## **Highlights on 9 October 2024 – Luminous Remembrance with International Artists**

Every year, Leipzig commemorates the annual Day of Remembrance with special events: the Leipzig Festival of Lights, the Prayer for Peace and the Speech on Democracy. In 2024, more than 20 international teams of artists will take up the historical events of 1989 and bring them to life in public space in their own artistic ways: spectacular mappings, projections, music, performances and other interventions will inspire and move tens of thousands of people. Several of Leipzig's twin cities will also be presenting their own projects: Frankfurt am Main, Krakow (Poland), Lyon (France) and Brno (Czech Republic). The giant candle podium, forming an illuminated '89', will be set up on Augustusplatz square. Candles will be provided free of charge to the visitors, who will traditionally decorate the podium with thousands of lights.

Other highlights on 9 October include the joint ceremony of the Free State of Saxony and the City of Leipzig in the Gewandhaus Concert Hall at 2:30 pm with speakers including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Marianne Birthler, former GDR civil rights activist and former Federal Commissioner for the Stasi Records. Another highlight is the Prayer for Peace in St Nicholas Church at 5 pm. From 7 pm until midnight, the Leipzig Festival of Lights 2024 will take place along the entire city centre ring road.

All projects and artists can be found in the programme overview at <https://www.lichtfest.leipziger-freiheit.de/programme.html>. Visitors to the Festival of Lights can also download the new Festival of Lights 2024 tour (audioversion also available) in the Explore Leipzig App and access it offline. Also new in 2024 is the 'Festival of Lights XXL': Five light projects will be on display until the weekend of 10-12 October 2024, each evening from 7 pm to 11 pm.

## Background to 9 October 1989 in Leipzig – the Day of Decision

9 October 1989 was the breakthrough of the Peaceful Revolution and a key event in German and European history. The date is regarded as the catalyst for the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 and the eventual reunification of Germany in 1990. 2024 marks the 35th anniversary of these events. The courage of the demonstrators and the 9 October 1989 have gone down in history. Every year on 9 October, the city of Leipzig commemorates the Peaceful Revolution of Autumn 1989 with the Festival of Lights.

Since 1982, peace, environmental and human rights groups have regularly invited people to pray for peace in St Nicholas' Church. It was from here that the Monday demonstrations began in September 1989. After the prayers for peace, more than 70,000 people gathered in Leipzig's city centre on 9 October - also known as the Day of Decision - to demonstrate around the city centre ring road, chanting the famous slogans 'We are the people' and 'No violence'. With courage and prudence, the demonstrators exposed the progressive loss of power of the GDR officials, and the feared military offensive failed to materialise. The SED regime capitulated to the peaceful superiority of the citizens. The courage of each individual participant cannot be overestimated. The non-violent nature of the Monday demonstrations was a stroke of historical luck or, as the pastor of St Nicholas' Church at the time, Christian Führer, said in retrospect, 'a miracle of biblical proportions'.

## Year-round Memorials to the Peaceful Revolution in Leipzig

Leipzig has a vibrant culture of remembrance in its public spaces, underlining its significance for contemporary democracy. Beyond the important date of 9 October, visitors can follow in the footsteps of the Peaceful Revolution, and not just on city tours. Throughout the year, museums and other institutions keep the memory of 1989 alive at authentic sites. See a selection:

- **St Nicholas Church Leipzig**

St Nicholas Church in Leipzig became a symbol of the Peaceful Revolution of 1989. Starting with the Monday peace prayers, which still take place every Monday at 5 pm in St Nicholas Church, protest conquered public space in 1989. An exhibition in the south chapel tells the story. The column in St Nicholas Churchyard, with its classical column motif from inside the church, commemorates those participants who could no longer fit into the overcrowded St Nicholas Church in the autumn of 1989. More details: <https://www.nikolaikirche.de/friedensgebet/friedensgebete/> and <https://www.leipzig.travel/en/poi/st-nicholas-church>

- **Memorial Museum in the 'Round Corner'**

The building, which housed the Leipzig District Administration for State Security for 40 years, is now home to the Memorial Museum in the 'Round Corner'. During the Peaceful Revolution, the Monday demonstrations passed by the former Stasi building, which was peacefully occupied on 4 December 1989. In the former offices of the Stasi, visitors can learn about the function, working methods and history of the Ministry for State Security. The authentic surroundings have been largely preserved to give visitors an idea of the working atmosphere that prevailed in the 'Round Corner' until 1989. It is an authentic site of both the history of repression and oppression in the GDR and the self-liberation from the dictatorship of the state security through the Peaceful Revolution. Guided tours are available on request, and a piece of the Berlin Wall is on display outside the memorial. More details: <https://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/> and <https://www.leipzig.travel/en/poi/memorial-museum-in-the-runde-ecke>

- **Forum of Contemporary History Leipzig**

The modern Museum Forum of Contemporary History Leipzig commemorates opposition, resistance and moral courage in the GDR against the background of German division. The exhibition, documentation and information centre offers a forum for active participation in the study of contemporary German history from the end of the Second World War to the present day. The museum also focuses on the process of reunification and the challenges facing a reunified Germany in the 21st century: how has Germany grown together since 1990 and what are people's concerns 35 years on?

More details: <https://www.leipzig.travel/en/poi/leipzig-forum-of-contemporary-history> and <https://www.hdg.de/en/zeitgeschichtliches-forum-leipzig>

- **Open-air Exhibition 'Sites of the Peaceful Revolution'**

At 20 original locations in the city centre, the open-air exhibition 'Sites of the Peaceful Revolution' with German-English texts allows visitors to experience the spirit of change in the years 1989-1990. Designed as a chronological tour, the exhibition illustrates how the oppositional actions of individuals gave rise to a mass movement that brought down the dictatorship in the GDR and paved the way for German unity. The steles offer a special kind of city tour for those who want to learn more about Leipzig's role as the city of the Peaceful Revolution. More details: <https://www.runde-ecke-leipzig.de/index.php?id=500&L=1>

- **'Iron Curtain' Site of European Heritage Label**

Since 2012, the St Nicholas' Church, the Memorial Museum in the 'Round Corner' and the Leipzig city centre ring road have officially been part of the 'Iron Curtain' European Heritage Label. The network brings together twelve places and sites that symbolise the creation, existence and overcoming of the Wall and barbed wire. Leipzig is the only one of the selected sites that is not located on the former German-German border and illustrates that the fall of the Iron Curtain would not have been possible without the Peaceful Revolution of 1989. More details: <https://www.netzwerk-eiserner-vorhang.de/startseite-en.html>

## **Statements on the Festival of Lights 2024**

- **Burkhard Jung, Lord Mayor of the City of Leipzig:**

"This year we celebrate the 35th anniversary of the great Leipzig Monday Demonstration. Not without concern for democracy in Europe and under the impression of conflicts and brutal wars. Since 1989 Leipzig has stood for change, freedom, peace and democracy. 9 October is a day of living democracy, commemorating the courage and perseverance of the Peaceful Revolution. Let us together remember the peace and freedom of 1989 and let us draw encouragement from it for today."

- **Marit Schulz, Authorised Signatory of LTM GmbH and Head of 'Leipzig Festival of Lights':**

"35 years of the Peaceful Revolution are an occasion to celebrate the Festival of Lights around the entire city centre ring road. Along the authentic demonstration route, local and international teams of artists will present more than 20 projects. I am particularly pleased that four of our twin cities - Frankfurt am Main, Lyon, Krakow and Brno - are taking part. This shows our solidarity today - but also underlines the significance of the 1989 protest movements in our neighbouring countries, Poland and the Czech Republic. With the 'Festival of Lights XXL' we will showcase selected projects beyond the evening of the Festival of Lights until the weekend, making the Festival of Lights 2024 an anniversary edition. This special event can only be realised together with many partners: I would like to thank our supporters and sponsors for their support over the years. I would also like to thank the jury for selecting the projects."

- **Bernhard Stief, Pastor of St Nicholas Church:**

“Peace, justice and the integrity of creation - the concerns that people expressed in the Prayers for Peace in St Nicholas Church were crucial to the awakening of 1989. Words shook up what had seemed unchangeable for decades. The spirit of hope and peacefulness worked its way out of the church and proved to be superior to the power of the SED. The musical message of the Prayer for Peace on 9 October 2024 will be excerpts from the work ‘Visions’ by John Rutter. The British composer draws on the ideal of heavenly peace as described in the Bible and ‘set before us human beings’.”

## **Further Information and Download Links**

- Official website with all projects and artists of the Leipzig Festival of Lights: <https://www.lichtfest.leipziger-freiheit.de/home.html>
- More details on the history of the Autumn of 1989: <https://www.lichtfest.leipziger-freiheit.de/autumn-of-1989.html>
- To download images: <https://www.lichtfest.leipziger-freiheit.de/presse-2024.html>
- Festival of Lights 2024 tour in Explore Leipzig App – Download iOS version, App Store: <https://apps.apple.com/de/app/explore-leipzig-city-tours/id6452014206>
- Festival of Lights 2024 tour in Explore Leipzig App – Download android version, Google Play: <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=de.droidsolutions.ltm.aggregator&pli=1>