

LOCATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF HISTORICAL SCIENCES OF 2026 IN JERUSALEM

Memo by the Executive Committee of the ICHTH Board

– meeting of the ICHTH Board of 13 January 2024 –

[5 January 2024]

I. SELECTED KEY DATES¹

- 1898: Preliminary International Historical Congress (The Hague).
1900: 1st International Congress of Historical Sciences (Paris).
1926: Establishment of the International Committee of Historical Sciences [CISH] (Brussels).
1980: Establishment of the International Commission for the History of Historiography (Bucharest)
[1980–1985: status of an internal commission of CISH; 1985–present: status of an international
affiliated organization of CISH (with a name change in 1995 into International Commission for the
History and Theory of Historiography [ICHTH]).
1982: Establishment of *Storia della Storiografia* as the ICHTH journal (Turin).
2022: 23rd International Congress of Historical Sciences (Poznań), Jerusalem chosen as next venue.
2024: CISH General Assembly (Tokyo) (26–27 October 2024), progress report on Jerusalem.
2026: 24th International Congress of Historical Sciences (Jerusalem) (26–31 July 2026).

II. BACKGROUND

1. The Historical Society of Israel (HSI), established in 1924, has been preparing the Jerusalem congress together with the Israel Academy of Science and Humanities, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and the Zalman Shazar Center since at least August 2020. On 2 February 2021, HSI President Shmuel Feiner presented HSI's official candidacy to CISH, attaching a 176-page brochure and offering Jerusalem as the primary location. Tel Aviv is also mentioned as a location.²
2. Meeting at the 23rd International Congress of Historical Sciences in Poznań in August 2022, the General Assembly³ of the International Committee of Historical Sciences [CISH] was offered two options for the venue of the 24th International Congress of Historical Sciences⁴ in 2026: Jerusalem or Leipzig. It opted for Jerusalem by a majority of votes.
3. The CISH website does not contain the minutes of the two August 2022 CISH General Assemblies.⁵ The minutes of ICHTH meetings in August 2022 are silent about the opinions within ICHTH about the venue or about the voting behavior of ICHTH in the CISH General Assembly.

¹ For background, see Karl Dietrich Erdmann, *Die Ökumene der Historiker: Geschichte der Internationalen Historikerkongresse und des Comité International des Sciences Historiques* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1987), 415–416, 460; Karl Dietrich Erdmann with Jürgen Kocka and Wolfgang Mommsen in collaboration with Agnes Blänsdorf, *Toward a Global Community of Historians: The International Historical Congresses and the International Committee of Historical Sciences, 1898–2000* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2005), 290–291, 375–376.

² The Historical Society of Israel, *Proposal to Host the XXIVth International Congress of Historical Sciences 2025 in Jerusalem, Israel* (Jerusalem: HSI, 2021, 176 pages), <https://www.historical.org.il/?lang=en>. The candidacy letter is at 6–7, the Jerusalem location is discussed at 31–41. The two final days of the Congress (out of seven) are scheduled to take place in Tel Aviv. The brochure does not refer to Palestinian historians, although historian Mustafa Abbasi of the organizing committee is specialized in Palestinian Arab history.

³ The CISH General Assembly consists of some 75 member organizations, including the ICHTH. See <https://www.cish.org/index.php/en/members>.

⁴ The 24th Congress was initially planned in 2025 according to the five-year cycle. But the 23rd Congress in Poznań had been delayed from 2020 to 2022 due to Covid-19 and therefore the next congress was postponed until 2026, to coincide with CISH's centennial anniversary.

⁵ See <https://www.cish.org>. But see Shmuel Feiner, "Speech at the Reception, CISH Congress, Poznań, 23 August 2022," in International Committee of Historical Sciences, *Newsletter No. 7* (October 2022), 3–4, <https://www.ichth.net/news/5.pdf>, including the quote: "Dear colleagues, as you probably know Jerusalem is also the

4. On 1–2 March 2023, the Executive Committee (Olufunke Adeboye, Daniel Woolf, Marnie Hughes-Warrington, Antoon De Baets) had an informal e-mail exchange of views about the venue. Some expressed concerns with respect to the prudence of the location and the likelihood of significant non-attendance owing to safety concerns.
5. On 6 September 2023, CISH Secretary-General Edoardo Tortarolo launched a Call for Panels for Jerusalem with a deadline on 28 February 2024.⁶ This call was mentioned in ICHTH Newsletter no. 2 of October 2023 and repeated in four reminders (31 October, 30 November, 21 December 2023, 4 January 2024) to the ICHTH membership.⁷ The ICHTH Executive Committee will look at the proposals on 30 January 2024 and the ICHTH Board on 19 February 2024 will decide on them in order to forward all or some to CISH by 28 February 2024. Importantly, CISH may also launch a second Call for Panels later.
6. The start of the Israel– Hamas War on 7 October 2023 reignited discussion about the venue, with several ICHTH members commenting on it, either formally or informally, either in favor or against or undecided: Board members Berber Bevernage, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Sanjay Seth; ex-President Antonis Liakos; ex-Secretary-General Edoardo Tortarolo, ex-Board members Sorin Antohi, Chris Lorenz, Estevão de Rezende Martins; Honorary Members Frank Ankersmit and Jürgen Kocka, and ICHTH members Luigi Cajani, Daho Djerbal, Valdei Lopes de Araújo, Rodrigo Patto Sá Motta, and Sacha Zala, among others.
7. On 19 December 2023, the Executive Committee, while continuing the procedure for the Call for Panels – which is independent of the location of the 2026 Congress –, decided to arrange an extraordinary ICHTH Board meeting about the venue. This meeting is scheduled for Saturday 13 January 2024. The present memo is meant to facilitate discussion and decision-making at that meeting. It contains a (hopefully balanced) overview of 16 arguments with pros and cons of the Jerusalem location and a (hopefully representative) range of options available to the ICHTH Board.
8. On 29 December 2023, the CISH Board announced that it would meet early in January 2024 to discuss the current situation and how to take further action with regard to the next Congress.⁸

III. SIXTEEN PROS AND CONS OF THE JERUSALEM LOCATION

Preliminary note: Arguments partly overlap and are arranged in no particular order. Some refer to Jerusalem, others to Israel.

Pro the Jerusalem location	Contra the Jerusalem location
<i>1. The ecumenical argument</i>	
After some difficult years, it is vital that CISH continue building the global community of historians in 2026.	Absence from the 2026 Congress is a more powerful and credible political statement to the global community of historians.
<i>2. The tradition argument</i>	
It is fitting to continue a great tradition and celebrate CISH’s centenary at the Congress.	The CISH centenary can be celebrated at other venues.
<i>3. The democracy argument</i>	
The ICHTH has to abide by the results of the democratic vote of the CISH General Assembly.	We are underinformed about how the Jerusalem decision was taken.
<i>4. The trust argument</i>	
The ICHTH is a trustworthy partner: <i>pacta sunt servanda</i> .	Circumstances have changed dramatically: exceptional measures justify exceptional derogation of the <i>pacta sunt servanda</i> rule.
<i>5. The lessons learned argument</i>	
The history of CISH congresses shows that the best way to support history in the region is to be there, especially in problematic times.	The history of CISH Congresses shows that the best way to support history in the region is to stay away, until problematic times are over.

heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We hope and pray for a peaceful solution, and as historians we believe that visiting the city itself, listening to different opinions, and witnessing closely the every day life will be a worthwhile experience, an opportunity to learn about the conflict first hand and formulate an opinion.”

⁶ For the call, see <https://www.ichth.net/news/17.pdf>.

⁷ For the ICHTH Newsletter, see <https://www.ichth.net/news/18.pdf>.

⁸ International Committee of Historical Sciences, *Newsletter No. 8* (December 2023), p. 2, <https://www.ichth.net/news/22.pdf>.

<i>6. The controversial venue argument</i>	
Controversial places can create good things. Some past CISH Congress venues – Moscow (1970), Bucharest (1980), Jinan (2015), even Poznań (2020/2022) – were also controversial and still contributed a lot.	Contributions (if any) of previous controversial CISH Congress venues do not justify the present gamble: Jerusalem is the occupied capital of Palestine and organizing the Congress there implicitly supports that occupation.
<i>7. The uncertain forecast argument</i>	
The present war was unpredictable in 2022 and the political situation in Israel in 2026 is unpredictable today.	The situation in Israel was already predictably problematic at the moment of the venue's choice in 2022 and even long before.
<i>8. The harm argument</i>	
Withdrawal means that we harm the Historical Society of Israel that has already invested massive efforts in the Congress.	While this harm is lamentable, the harm afflicted to those Palestinian and Israeli historians who suffer from the present regime, either inside or outside Israel's borders, is disproportional.
<i>9. The boycott argument</i>	
A Congress boycott risks punishing the wrong people: the organizers are not responsible for their government's policy and conduct and may in fact very well be opponents of them.	A Congress boycott should not be taken personally; it is a cultural instrument to achieve a political goal.
<i>10. The symbolic effect argument</i>	
The overall symbolic effect of the Congress will be beneficial.	The overall symbolic effect of the Congress will be negative.
<i>11. The geopolitical argument</i>	
Israel is the only Middle Eastern country with the capacity to organize the 2026 Congress, the first ever in the region. Without it, the region is let down for years to come. We should seize the moment to strengthen our presence there.	The main target is not Israel, but Jerusalem, which is a contested capital. Attendance there is de facto support for current Israeli policies toward the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Congress will weaken our presence in the region in the longer term.
<i>12. The academic argument</i>	
We go to Jerusalem to talk science, not politics. The Congress helps prevent the isolation of the Israeli historians and support the voice of reason.	Science cannot be separated from politics. Talking about preventing isolation: think about our Palestinian colleagues whom we now leave in the dark.
<i>13. The peace versus war argument</i>	
The Congress is an instrument of international contacts and cooperation in the scientific field and therefore it has to potential to promote peace.	An armed conflict ⁹ is going on in the country, with war crimes and crimes against humanity being committed on both sides. ¹⁰ Holding a Congress in a war-torn country is morally inadmissible.
<i>14. The tu quoque argument</i>	
Israel's war crimes are reprehensible but no more so than those committed by other parties or countries in the region in this or other armed conflicts.	The fact that other parties or countries in the region committed war crimes in this or other armed conflicts does not excuse those of Israel.
<i>15. The visa and safety argument</i>	
The Congress is open to all historians wishing to participate.	We are underinformed about which passports Israel bars from entry and which countries advise not to travel to Israel for safety reasons.
<i>16. The cultural heritage argument</i>	
Israel – and Jerusalem in particular – is a place with a rich cultural heritage and therefore a worthy location.	This argument is secondary at best and irrelevant at worst.

⁹ The legal status of the conflict is contested: see Jérôme de Hemptinne, "Classifying the Gaza Conflict under International Humanitarian Law, a Complicated Matter," *EJIL: Talk!* (13 November 2023); Ayesha Malik, "Classification of the Israel-Palestine Conflict under the Laws of War," *Opinio Juris* (24 November 2023).

¹⁰ See also International Court of Justice, *Application Instituting Proceedings* [Proceedings instituted by South Africa against Israel on 29 December 2023 within the framework of the 1948 Genocide Convention] (28 December 2023).

IV. FOUR OPTIONS FOR ICHTH

Preliminary notes

1. *The following options are proposals.*
2. *The following options are designed for ICHTH policy and do not affect personal decisions of ICHTH members to attend or not the 2026 Congress.*
3. *“Moderate” conditions are conditions with organizational effects. “Severe” conditions are conditions with organizational and political effects.*

Option 1. Jerusalem is acceptable as a location without conditions.

Option 2. Jerusalem is acceptable as a location under moderate conditions, including all or some of the following five:

- Organize a visit to Birzeit University during the Congress.¹¹
- Officially invite 20 Palestinian historians from within Israel, from the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and from the Palestinian diaspora; pay their expenses from the CISH Solidarity Fund.¹²
- Officially invite NGO’s; pay their expenses from the CISH Solidarity Fund.¹³
- Organize a Main Theme at the Congress about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 1917–2026.
- Organize a Main Theme at the Congress about Partitions in world history.

Option 3. Israel is acceptable as a location under severe conditions, including the following two:

- Disinvite President Yitzhak Herzog from opening the Congress in person.
- Move the Congress location entirely from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv.

Option 4. Jerusalem and Israel are not acceptable as locations.

V. PROPOSED FOLLOW-UP

Preliminary note: the proposed follow-up is provisional in that the ICHTH Board and Executive Committee can adapt it to changing circumstances.

- Step 1: The ICHTH Board votes on the four options.
Note: A confidential link to vote will be sent to all ICHTH Board members after the *meeting* (regardless of attendance) with time to vote until 16 January 2024 included. The option that receives a majority of votes cast will be carried. In case of an equality of votes, the President has a casting vote in addition to his original vote. On 30 January 2024 or earlier, the ICHTH Executive Committee will meet and discuss the result.
- Step 2: The CISH Board is informed about the ICHTH decision as soon as possible after this ICHTH Executive Committee meeting.¹⁴
- Step 3: The ICHTH Board decision as it is in October 2024 is defended at the CISH General Assembly in Tokyo.
- Step 4: The ICHTH Board implements the decision taken at the CISH General Assembly in Tokyo.

¹¹ <https://www.birzeit.edu/en>.

¹² <https://www.cish.org/index.php/en/membership> and <https://www.cish.org/index.php/en/?s=solidarity+fund>.

¹³ An (unverified) longlist from which to select could include: Akevot (<https://www.akevot.org.il/en/>); Al Haq (<https://www.alhaq.org/>); Alternative Information Center Palestine (<https://www.aicpalestine.org/index.php/en/>); Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education (<https://www.impact-se.org/>); Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (<https://www.pcpsr.org/>); Sakakini (<https://sakakini.org/?lang=en>).

¹⁴ <https://www.cish.org/index.php/en/presentation/the-ichs-board>.