

Nuremberg and the battle against COVID-19: lessons learned from a government in transition

ATLANTA - As the world faces the challenges imposed by COVID-19, Nuremberg confirms its pursuit in promoting cooperation and human rights. Even as shelter-in-place and social distancing measures were implemented, the City of Nuremberg ensured these measures did not prevent communication and engagement with its partners. At the onset of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the German city reached out to its 15 sister cities to express its solidarity and support. Through this effort, Nuremberg not only attended the virtual summit "Sister City Diplomacy" organized by City of Atlanta Mayor's Office of International Affairs, but also sent three health care specialists to Skopje (North Macedonia) in an effort to support that city's fight against the virus.

"This era also has its positive sides. The communication with Atlanta is even more intense than before", states Christina Plewinski, International Officer at City of Nuremberg's Department for International Relations. "We found other means of communication to exchange best practices. If we are asked to do something for a city, we can react faster," she explains.

Nuremberg is currently in the process of reopening its facilities and stores gradually. Since the end of June, local restaurants are permitted to stay open during regular business hours, and groups up to 100 may meet in closed environments. Additionally, their City Hall is now open to provide in-person requests. Nuremberg also benefited from the reinforcement of its public servants in strategic areas. Some city workers were temporarily relocated from their primary duties to other departmental services such as car registrations and passport issues.

Nuremberg's measures were implemented in the midst of a government transition. In May, the city witnessed the inauguration of its new mayor and councilors. After taking office, Mayor Marcus Konig and Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms exchanged letters expressing solidarity and support for residents and businesses impacted by the coronavirus pandemic. Nuremberg and Atlanta have a decades-long history since signing their sister city agreement in August 1998. Atlanta's role as the cradle of the civil rights movement gave the two sides a launch point for dialogue and an avenue for increased cooperation. Nuremberg's legacy since the end of WWII has demonstrated an enhanced commitment to human rights and ethics with the promotion of events like the Human Rights Film Festival and the Nuremberg International Human Rights Award.

Since then, the two cities have established partnerships in various fields, such as human rights, education, culture, business, and diplomacy. Since 2014, for example, the Maynard Jackson High School Atlanta and the Sigmund-Schuckert Gymnasium Nuremberg established a student exchange that incorporates human rights projects in cooperation with the National Center for Civil and Human Rights. Because of the restrictions related to COVID-19, the cities are preparing a virtual program this year.

"[Our cities] work on the same agenda. We work for human rights and connecting people. Whatever we face, the most important thing is to stay in touch and work together," Ms. Plewinski highlighted. "We are proud to be part of the global family and have managed international communication during the health crisis very well".

