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**PRESS RELEASE**

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**Descendants, Dignitaries Gather to Honor Legacy of Cabo Verde's Jewish Community**

**Ribeira Grande, Santo Antão, Cabo Verde, November 5-6, 2018** – Dozens of people, including many descendants of Cabo Verde's Jewish community, local and national government officials, dignitaries from the United States and Israel, the chief rabbi of Lisbon and local residents, gathered in Ribeira Grande, Santo Antão on November 6, to re-dedicate two recently restored Jewish cemeteries to honor the memory of Sephardic Jews who immigrated to Cape Verde from Morocco and Gibraltar in the 19th century.

**The President of the Cabo Verdean National Assembly, Jorge Santos**, spoke on behalf of the central government, which recently classified the cemeteries as National Historical and Cultural Patrimony. A native of Santo Antão and former mayor of Ribeira Grande, Santos spoke with pride of the many Jewish families who contributed to the island's economic development, particularly in the area of agriculture.

**The Mayor of Ribeira Grande, Orlando Delgado**, underscored the pivotal role Jews played in Santo Antão – especially in fields of agriculture and commerce and promised maintain and protect the newly restored cemeteries and integrate them into the island's cultural tourism circuit.

**Carol Castiel, President of the US-based nonprofit Cape Verde Jewish Heritage Project (CVJHP)**, which financed the restoration, thanks to a generous grant from H.M. King Mohammed of Morocco, praised her Cabo Verdean partners and the many descendants of the Jews who inspired her to bring this day to fruition.

**The chief rabbi of the Jewish community of Lisbon, Natan Peres**, offered traditional Hebrew prayers (Hascaba) for the 14 souls buried in the Ponta do Sol and Penha de Franca cemeteries.

**The U.S. Embassy, represented by Chargée d'affaires, Marissa Scott**, is a strong supporter of and important donor to CVJHP.

It was the first visit to Cabo Verde by **Daniel Aschheim, Deputy Chief of Mission at the Embassy of Israel, (based in Dakar)** who said: "It was a true honor to represent Israel, the Jewish State, in this important and moving dedication ceremony, commemorating the rich Jewish heritage, culture and history of Cabo Verde. Thanks to the Cape Verde Jewish Heritage Project, the history of this community will forever be remembered."

**Natan Peres, chief rabbi of the Jewish community of Lisbon**, said "It was a great honor to participate in this event and witness the pride and respect from local residents and government officials towards the Jewish heritage of the island. It was an emotional event for everyone, especially the descendants of the original

Jewish families, an event which crowned the long and hard work of the Foundation (CVJHP) on this restoration project. Hopefully it will be the beginning of many more such events and projects which will continue to bring to life this rich legacy which had so much impact on the island becoming inseparable part of its identity. In times such as ours of increasing intolerance and divisiveness, the Jewish legacy in Cabo Verde is an example of peaceful and harmonious co-existence that can be a beacon of light not only for Africa but across the world. I hope to be able to participate and support the future work of the foundation. I truly feel honored to have been part of this historic event."

"The Sephardic Jews, who came to Cape Verde in the 19th century from mostly Morocco and Gibraltar, were a small group, but they and their descendants had a tremendous impact on the development of the country," **said Carol Castiel, president and founder of The Cape Verde Jewish Heritage Project.** Castiel is broadcaster at the Voice of America and devotes her time and energy on a pro-bono basis as the manager of the multi-faceted project, which foresees the publication of a book on the Jewish presence next year. "The Jews of Cape Verde and their descendants are an integral part of the multicultural, multiethnic identity of Cabo Verde. Our efforts to restore and preserve Jewish cemeteries in Cabo Verde will not only help document this almost-forgotten chapter of Cabo Verde's history, but also contribute to the promotion of cultural tourism, a potential source of important of revenue for the archipelago."

A sizeable delegation of descendants, whose ancestors are buried in Ponta do Sol and Penha de Franca, came from the capital, Praia, to honor their memory including, **Januario Nascimento of the Auday family.** Januario, former president of AMICAEL (The friends of Israel and Cabo Verde Society), began pressing for the restoration of the country's Jewish burial grounds in the early 1990's. Castiel informally joined forces with him around 1995; he now serves on CVJHP' advisory board. Other prominent descendants included: **Sofia de Oliveira Lima,** CVJHP representative in Praia, and descendant of the legendary Wahnnon family; **Zelinda Cohen,** historian and former head of the Cabo Verdean Human Rights Commission; **Carla Brigham (Ohayon family),** commercial attaché in the American Embassy; and renowned **Cabo Verdean vocalist, Gardenia Benros.** Gardenia performed at a closing dinner on November 6 at which both the chargé d'affaires of the US and Israeli Embassies offered words of deep appreciation to all stakeholders—CVJHP, the local and national governments, descendants and others who are working to preserve and maintain in perpetuity Cabo Verde's Jewish heritage.

**World renowned Cabo Verdean singer, Gardenia Benros,** who made a special trip to Cabo Verde from her home in Florida to be at the ceremony, said "For me it was very important to be present at the ceremony and honor my ancestors. We must never forget the ones who came before us and paved the way so that we could have a better present. The Jewish contribution to CV is finally recognized and respected. I was touched by the prayer the Rabi made. Hearing the names of the Benros families being mentioned, it was very emotional. I noticed that my cousin Ildo Benros had tears in his eyes. I felt my father and grandfather's spiritual presence as I reminisced the family stories I was told. I was also happy to see that they were laid to rest with the proper prayer they deserved, it left me feeling peaceful and proud of my heritage."

"The beautiful inauguration ceremony for the two Jewish cemeteries in Santo Antão symbolizes Castiel's love of Cabo Verde's Jewish Heritage---Her love of our Jewish ancestors who devoted themselves to this land which welcomed them, and who did not renounce their Jewish traditions, such as burying their deceased in accordance with Jewish law," **said descendant of the Wahnnon family, Sofia de Oliveira Lima, President of the Cabo Verde Lawyer's Association, and CVJHP representative in Cabo Verde.**

**Former head of the Human Rights Commission in Cabo Verde and descendant of the Cohen clan, Zelinda Cohen** said "as a descendent of one of the Jewish families who settled in Cabo Verde, but also as a historian, I believe that the restoration of the two Jewish cemeteries in the island of Santo Antão, where most of the Jews settled, is very pertinent and timely. Returning the two restored cemeteries to Cabo Verdean society, on the one hand reinforces a sense of belonging among the Jewish descendants, and on the other, it infuses a sense

of a consciousness among the new generations that the Jewish community is an essential component of the Cabo Verdean nation.”

The Santo Antão burial grounds are the second and third of four slated to be restored and rededicated by the Cape Verdean authorities with funding from the [Cape Verde Jewish Heritage Project](#) (CVJHP). The Jewish burial ground in Praia was dedicated in 2013. The Jewish cemetery in Boa Vista will be next on the agenda.

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**CVJHP, a nonprofit 501(c)(3) organization created in 2007 and based in Washington, aims to honor the memory of the many Sephardic Jews** who immigrated to Cape Verde in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by restoring and preserving their cemeteries, which had fallen into neglect and disrepair, and by documenting their little-known legacy. CVJHP historian, Angela Sofia Benoliel Coutinho, is writing a book about the Jewish presence, to be published soon.

Carol Castiel is president; John C. Wahnnon is Vice President; and Sofia de Oliveira Lima is CVJHP representative in Praia. They work “pro-bono.” Carol is a broadcast journalist at the Voice of America. Sofia de Oliveira Lima is the President of the Cabo Verde Lawyer’s Association. For more information please visit:

[www.capeverdejewishheritage.org](http://www.capeverdejewishheritage.org), <http://www.facebook.com/CVJHP>

Cape Verde, an archipelago of 10 islands off the coast of Senegal, has an international reputation as one of the most stable democracies in the African continent. At a time when anti-Semitism is on the rise in so many parts of the world, Cabo Verde remains a beacon of tolerance and mutual respect.

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