

Association of Jews in Belgium

(in French, *Association des Juifs en Belgique*, AJB; in Flemish, *Jodenvereeniguing van België*), *Judenrat*-like organization forced upon the Jews of Belgium by the Nazis during World War II.

The Germans invaded Belgium in May 1940. That fall, the Jews of Belgium set up their own coordinating committee. However, on November 25, the Security Police ordered the creation of the AJB. Officially, the association was supposed to take care of the needs of the Jewish community. In reality, however, its main function was to register the country's Jews for forced labor and deportations to extermination camps.

In December 1941 an executive board was appointed, with the chief rabbi of Belgium, Rabbi Salomon Ullmann, as its chairman. Four local committees worked under the executive board, in Brussels, Antwerp, Charleroi, and Liege—the cities with the largest Jewish communities.

From the beginning, the AJB was not liked, trusted, or respected by Belgian Jewry. In May 1942 the Germans ordered the Jews to wear the Jewish badge (see also *Badge, Jewish*). In July the association's executive director, Maurice Benedictus, was made responsible to help the Germans deport the Jews. That summer, the AJB listed many new people as its employees in order to help them avoid being sent to do forced labor in France. This helped improve the association's reputation.

In August 1943 the first five transports left Belgium for Auschwitz. The AJB's standing quickly deteriorated. Rabbi Ullmann left his job as chairman in early September, and the Charleroi local association committee decided to dissolve itself. The weakened association mainly dealt with welfare and educational work. After many Belgian Jews were arrested in September, the AJB deteriorated even further. Most of the Jews left in Belgium either worked for the association or lived in one of its institutions. At that point, many of the AJB's employees worked for the underground.

In August 1944 the AJB decided to stop its operations, and hid 600 orphans who had been living under its care. They were saved when Allied forces entered Brussels in early September.

