Slave Labor

U.S., Germany Start Nazi Slave Talks After Delay

Clinton walks into Holocaust row on eve of fund signing

Jewish Victims of 'Aryanization' and Slave Labor File Class Action Lawsuit against Austria

General

Holocaust families get $20 mln from Swiss banks

Dutch declined to return looted securities -WJC

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U.S., Germany Start Nazi Slave Talks After Delay

By Adam Tanner

BERLIN (Reuters) - Top U.S. and German negotiators started a delayed meeting on Thursday designed to hammer out the last details of a deal to compensate Nazi-era slave and forced laborers, officials said.

Negotiators appear close to finalising a 10-billion mark ($4.75 billion) fund to compensate many thousands of surviving slave laborers, but still disagree on the legal fine print.

"Not everything has been clarified yet, but we are keeping all options open," said German spokesman Wolf-Eckart Meyhoeffer. "We have reserved a room in the government press office in case we need to make an announcement later this evening."

The meeting between U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat and chief German mediator Otto Lambsdorff began shortly after President Clinton's arrival.

Talks began several hours late as national delegations huddled together for strategy talks. Officials said no specific new problems had arisen.

Clinton has not scheduled a signing ceremony for the deal, but officials hope his trip -- perhaps the last to Germany of his presidency -- will prod negotiators to agree final details.

Eizenstat has said a deal was possible this week.

Legal Sticking Points

The main sticking point concerns German industry's worries that it could still face lawsuits after the settlement.

German officials want a strong declaration of "legal closure" from the U.S. government, but after lower-level talks on Wednesday said they were still not satisfied.
Under the deal, German industry and the government would each contribute five billion marks, but with tax breaks Berlin is expected to foot about three-quarters of the compensation.

Some of Germany’s largest firms launched the fund initiative just over a year after being faced with huge legal claims by mainly U.S.-based class action lawyers.

In 1944 about 10 million civilian foreigners and prisoners of war forcibly worked for the Nazis, many of whom were sent in box cars to Germany to toil under deplorable conditions.

The settlement today is expected to compensate 240,000 surviving slave laborers, of whom more than half are Jewish and many of whom live in the United States.

The deal will also offer payments to about one million people, mostly from eastern Europe, who worked as forced laborers -- which means the Nazis did not try deliberately to kill them off as they did with slave laborers.

The negotiations were taking place at the Foreign Ministry -- once the Nazi Reichsbank which stored the gold and other valuables stolen from murdered victims in Auschwitz and other World War Two concentration camps.

**Clinton walks into Holocaust row on eve of fund signing**

By Imre Karacs in Berlin

1 June 2000

A storm over compensation to Holocaust victims threatens to mar President Bill Clinton’s European tour, scuppering the signing ceremony that was to have crowned his visit to Germany, where he arrives today.

The signatures of the United States President and Chancellor Gerhard Schröder were to have brought into life the agreement setting up a DM10bn (£3.3bn) fund to compensate forced labourers and slave workers of the Nazi era. But with German industry - which has agreed to split the bill with the Berlin government - still DM2bn short of the money pledged and upping its demands at the last minute, officials of both countries said yesterday that Mr Clinton would return home empty-handed.

German companies claim to have discovered this week that they would not be granted cast-iron immunity against prosecution in American courts in return for participation in the fund. The US counters that they are merely stalling for time.

A senior American official close to the negotiations said: "It's 100 per cent security being sought, and we have offered 99 per cent." The sticking point is one tiny phrase in the document: Germany wants the words "not legally binding" removed. Washington says it cannot do that, because it holds no legal sway over America’s independent courts.

There is a deeper problem. According to its charter, the Holocaust fund is only allowed to start paying out to victims when its coffers are full. But while the American Jewish Committee last year listed some 400 German companies that coerced Jews and citizens of occupied countries to work for the Nazi war effort, at the last count about 240 of these had not pledged a single pfennig.

Deidre Berger, managing director of the committee’s Berlin office, said: "These companies have obstinately rejected their responsibilities." Many others have pledged only token sums and, although hundreds of firms founded after the war and so innocent of Nazi crimes have made contributions, these cannot make up the shortfall.

It has taken two years of bargaining to reach this point, while an estimated 10,000 of the fund's would-be
beneficiaries are dying every month.

President Clinton's annoyance with the hitch is unlikely to be tempered by a reception from a government seething with resentment at perceived US high-handedness, especially over defence. Berlin is perhaps the loudest among Nato partners in its condemnation of US plans for an anti-missile umbrella over its skies.

"We are not denying anyone's right to defend themselves," a German official said earlier this week. "But this needs to be worked out within the alliance, so that all partners can live with it without creating differential security zones or jeopardising the delicate architecture of disarmament."

Recently, the Germans have been able to work out almost nothing with their US friends, and Mr Clinton's visit might even make matters worse.

Jewish Victims of 'Aryanization' and Slave Labor File Class Action Lawsuit against Austria

NEW YORK, May 31 /PRNewswire/ -- A federal class-action lawsuit has been filed against the Republic of Austria, two major institutions controlled by that State and unnamed Austrian, state-owned banking institutions, on behalf of "all Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, their heirs and beneficiaries," whose assets were converted by the defendants, or who were forced to perform slave labor in Austria by the defendants.

The suit was filed in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York late Friday evening, May 26, 2000, by Milberg Weiss Bershad Hynes & Lerach LLP. It alleges that the defendants knowingly obtained enormous economic benefit from their participation in "Aryanization," the seizure of Jewish-owned assets in collaboration with "the Reich's Office of Asset Management (Vermoegensverkehrsstelle, the 'VVSt'), the central agency charged with the Aryanization of Jewish-owned property in Austria" and that the defendants participated in and profited from an "illegal, inhuman and genocidal system of slave labor inflicted upon Jews deemed 'subhuman' and used as disposable chattels and slaves."

Name partner Melvyn I. Weiss and attorney Deborah M. Sturman of Milberg Weiss, the attorneys generally credited with reopening the long dormant Nazi slave-labor cases, drafted the historic complaint, along with Harvard Law Professor Arthur R. Miller, NYU Professor Burt Neuborne (director of the Brennan Center for Justice), and local counsel in San Francisco and Indianapolis. Mr. Weiss noted that a recently announced $400 million Austrian compensation fund explicitly excluded Jewish victims of "Aryanization" and slave labor, which, he said, was particularly offensive given the enormity of the persecution of Jews at the time and the magnitude of their losses.

When asked why the class action was filed, since Austrian Chancellor Wolfgang Schuessel has pledged to start work on compensating Jews stripped of their property under the Nazis, Mr. Weiss said simply, "They did nothing for half a century. There was no movement to compensate the victims until our cases were filed. Action must be swift and comprehensive before all the victims are long gone. Without the pressure of class action lawsuits there would be no compensation."

The complaint -- Bettelheim v. Republic of Austria -- asks for an accounting of the class members' assets appropriated by the defendants, that a constructive trust be imposed upon defendants' assets, restitution of property, disgorgement of defendants' illicit profits, compensatory damages together with interest compounded annually from May 8, 1945, exemplary or punitive damages, fees and costs.

Milberg Weiss Bershad Hynes & Lerach LLP is a 145-lawyer firm with offices in New York, San Diego, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Boca Raton. The firm has been actively engaged in commercial litigation, emphasizing securities, consumer, insurance, healthcare, human rights and antitrust class actions, for more than 30 years. Milberg Weiss also has an active corporate and securities practice. The firm's reputation for excellence has been recognized on repeated occasions by courts that have appointed it to major positions in complex multi-district or consolidated litigations. Milberg Weiss has taken a lead role in numerous complex litigations on behalf of defrauded investors, consumers and companies, as well as victims of World War II human rights violations, and has been responsible for more than $20 billion in recoveries.

Holocaust families get $20 mln from Swiss banks

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, May 31 (Reuters) - Though the $1.3 billion Swiss bank settlement with Holocaust survivors has yet to be finalised, $20 million already has been paid to some 2,500 claimants under a preliminary process, the World Jewish
Congress said on Wednesday.

These initial payments will be increased with interest once the U.S. judge presiding over the historic class action suit against Swiss banks decides how much interest is due and rules the settlement is fair, Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director, told Reuters.

Swiss banks agreed two years ago to pay the money to settle 55-year-old charges that they had robbed Holocaust families by preventing them from withdrawing prewar deposits.

"The unknown story is that although the bank settlement has not yet been paid, more than 2,500 claims against Swiss bank accounts have been awarded," Steinberg said. These payments will be deducted from the overall settlement, he added.

Holocaust survivors and heirs who did not use the interim process -- perhaps because they only have sketchy information about their families' prewar banking deposits -- had to wait until an exhaustive audit of the Swiss banks was completed.

Though that audit conducted by the Volcker commission was finished in December, a dispute over how many Holocaust-era bank accounts would be entered in a data base to verify claims delayed the process.

A compromise has been proposed, under which the two biggest banks -- Credit Suisse and UBS -- will create a data base with 2.1 million Holocaust-era accounts. While that is far short of the 4.1 million account data base the Volcker commission recommended, Jewish advocacy groups have accepted the plan because they do not want to further delay payments to Holocaust survivors as most of them are quite elderly.

Steinberg said the initial results produced by the interim process showed that Swiss banks had been less than forthcoming when bad publicity and law suits forced them to grapple with claims from Holocaust survivors.

"Years ago, the Swiss banks claimed there were no more than 775 dormant accounts," he said.

Some $180 million already has been paid out to 250,000 people from a separate Swiss fund designed to aid impoverished people who were persecuted by the Nazis, Steinberg added. One of the final payments is a $2 million grant to some 1,700 Christians who saved Jews from the Nazis. About 40,000 people who are not Jewish have been aided by the Swiss humanitarian fund, according to Steinberg.

The list of non Jews who have been helped included the disabled, gypsies, political opponents of the Nazis, and Jehovah's Witnesses. "We even identified 100 Christians who had been persecuted as Jews by the Nazis," Steinberg said.

Dutch declined to return looted securities -WJC

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, May 31 (Reuters) - The World Jewish Congress on Wednesday charged that the postwar Dutch government refused to help return some $205 million worth of looted securities to Holocaust families, saying that this is one of several problems that now must be resolved.

A group of 900 U.S. public finance officers last week gave Dutch banks and the Dutch stock exchange a 30-day deadline to come up with a plan to resolve long-standing charges that they profited from Nazi war crimes, such as the wholesale looting of Jewish assets.

But Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director, who had proposed the 30-day deadline, told Reuters he now has asked the group, which is led by New York City Comptroller Alan Hevesi, to hold off until June 5 when Dutch Jewish groups meet with Dutch banks and the Amsterdam bourse.

"We're hoping there is a positive outcome," he said. If the meeting makes progress, the WJC then might withdraw its threat to fight plans by ING Groep NV -- Europe's fifth largest financial institution -- to buy U.S. insurer ReliaStar Financial Corp for $5.1 billion, Steinberg said.

The Amsterdam bourse, which is in the midst of linking with Brussels and Paris to form the Euronext stock exchange, has said it has nothing to fear from the WJC's demands. Still, Euronext might find the WJC has taken its objections to U.S. regulators if Holocaust claims are not settled and Euronext continues with plans to link with the New York Stock Exchange.
In 1941, one of the Nazi agencies that confiscated Jewish valuables, called the Lippmann bank, became a member of the Amsterdam stock exchange, where it sold the securities it had plundered.

Responding to an Oct. 15, 1946 inquiry by the U.S. Treasury, the Netherlands' Washington, D.C.-based embassy on Dec. 12 said people from whom negotiable securities had been looted could only recover them if the present holder did not get them in good faith.

"He who has acquired such securities in regular stock exchange trade, is presumed to have acted in good faith. This presumption is, however, rebuttable," the Dutch embassy said.

The WJC, a Jewish advocacy group, provided Reuters the letters from the Treasury and the Dutch embassy.

"(This) explains why so many of these securities were never returned, which in effect makes the postwar Dutch government and stock exchange accomplices in an effort to prevent the rightful owners from acquiring their assets," Steinberg said.
Subject: HOLOCAUST ASSETS CLIPS 05/02/00

Slave Labor
   German Payments to Nazi Slaves Feared Delayed

Insurance
   Holocaust claims seen wrongly rejected
   Allianz-Holocaust claims review in line with criteria
   Calif group pulls $119 mln from fund over Holocaust

Art
   Museum Buys Back Nazi Paintings

General
   Net school teaching Holocaust worldwide

June 2, 2000

German Payments to Nazi Slaves Feared Delayed
By Mark John BERLIN (Reuters) - U.S. and German officials raised concerns Friday that compensation payments to surviving Nazi-era slave workers could face delays after talks failed to resolve a legal dispute holding up an industry-backed fund.

There had been hopes the presence in Germany of President Clinton for a three-day visit might prompt a breakthrough over the form of protection to be offered to German companies from U.S. legal claims over their wartime past in return for paying into the $4.8 billion fund.

But Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat, the chief U.S. negotiator, said no deal had been reached and warned a previous goal to release the first payments to survivors by the year-end was in doubt.

“‘That is much more uncertain,” he told Reuters after the talks ended. He declined to comment on when the elderly survivors or their heirs, in many cases living in poverty in central and eastern Europe, could expect payments.

Eizenstat said he remained hopeful that agreement on “legal closure” could be reached in newly scheduled talks set for June 12 in Washington, a point emphasized by his German counterpart, former Economics Minister Otto Lambsdorff.
“We must agree on conclusive final arrangements then,” he told a news briefing. “If we don’t get the whole thing going, then the million or so survivors will have to wait even longer for the payments.”

German industry and the government have each pledged to contribute five billion marks ($2.4 billion) to the fund. With available tax breaks, the state will end up footing about three-quarters of the compensation, however.

Lambsdorff exhibited frustration at the fact that just 60 percent of the industry contribution had been raised so far, accusing firms of using the dispute over legal closure as a “lazy pretext” not to pay up.

**German Firms Seek Tighter Guarantees**

Any final agreement must be approved by the German parliament and a plenary session at which representatives from surviving victims around the world would give their assent.

The dispute centers on the precise wording of a planned "statement of interest" that the U.S. government will issue instructing courts not to take up future legal action against German firms on claims covered by the fund.

German industry spokesman Wolfgang Gibowski said the U.S. side had offered to instruct courts to drop such action where there was a clear foreign policy interest in doing so.

“But this is not enough,” said Gibowski. “We want the U.S. government to instruct the courts to dismiss further claims on both legal and political grounds,” he said.

Some of Germany’s largest firms launched the fund initiative just over a year ago after being faced with huge legal claims by mainly U.S.-based class action lawyers.

In 1944 about 10 million civilian foreigners and prisoners of war forcibly worked for the Nazis, many of whom were sent in boxcars to Germany to toil under deplorable conditions.

The settlement is expected to compensate 240,000 surviving slave laborers, of whom more than half are Jewish and many of whom live in the United States.

The deal will also offer payments to about one million people, mostly from eastern Europe, who worked as forced laborers -- which means the Nazis did not try deliberately to kill them off as they did with slave laborers.

A further category covers compensation for Nazi looting of assets from their victims during the “Aryanization” of the German economy where it has been established that companies benefited directly or indirectly as a result.

**Holocaust claims seen wrongly rejected**

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, June 1 (Reuters) - The International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance Claims has accused five member-companies of wrongly rejecting some claims by Holocaust survivors, according to a document obtained by Reuters on Thursday.

The internal commission document making the accusation is part of the record in a California court case in which the European insurers are trying to overturn a state law that requires them to report unpaid Holocaust-era insurance claims.

The document said the insurers -- Allianz AG (quote from Yahoo! UK & Ireland: ALVG.F <http://finance.uk.yahoo.com/quotes/ukie/q?s=ALVG.F&amp;d=t>), AXA, Generali (), Winterthur and Zurich Allied -- had demanded too high a standard of evidence to back the claims.
The insurers, all members of the International Commission, have agreed to use relatively undemanding standards of proof because of the special nature of Holocaust claims. Few, if any, survivors walked out of concentration camps with insurance documents, bank books or other financial records.

Swiss banks two years ago reached a $1.3 billion agreement with Holocaust families to settle charges that they had prevented them from ever withdrawing bank deposits, partly by demanding impossible proofs such as death certificates from concentration camps.

Officials of the International Commission, based in Washington D.C., were not immediately available to comment on the document.

It listed examples of insurance claims that had been rejected under the Holocaust insurance panel’s fast track process.

One claimant had no policy documents, but in September last year put in a claim identifying the insurance company, the number of policies, and the city where the insurance was bought.

The claimant sent in a letter written by the policy holder -- shortly before he was deported by the Nazis -- that listed all assets.

In February this year the insurer told the claimant it had found no evidence of a contractual relationship, and that the letter was not adequate proof.

Another claimant identified the insurance company, the currency, the policy value, the date it was taken out, how long payments were made, and when they stopped. The claimant sent in note that had been handwritten by the person’s mother, listing assets -- including two insurance policies.

After the claimant asked why the claim was rejected, the insurance company replied: “These standards require that a minimum written evidence of the existence of a policy is found.”

Neal Sher, chief of staff for the commission, last week told a group that represents 900 public U.S. finance officers that under the special fast track process, the insurers reviewed more than 500 claims but made only 143 offers.

He said the high rejection rate might mean the insurers were incorrectly applying the commission’s standards, a possibility that a review will determine.

Because of the high rejection rate, the commission, which already has begun handling claims under its regular procedures, is interviewing arbiters for an appeals process to judge the rejected claims.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, which is a member of the commission, said the panel’s relaxed standard of proof was defined as evidence which was “plausible in the light of the special circumstances including, but not limited to, the destruction caused by World War Two, the Holocaust, and the lengthy period of time that has passed since the insurance policy under consideration was obtained.”

Steinberg said Generali had the highest acceptance rate. “Not all the insurance companies have acted in the same manner,” he said.


Allianz-Holocaust claims review in line with criteria

MUNICH, June 2 (Reuters) - German insurer Allianz AG said on Friday it has been reviewing Holocaust-era insurance claims according to the criteria set by an international commission handling claims from Holocaust
survivors.

In an internal document obtained by Reuters, the Washington D.C.-based commission accused Allianz and four other commission member companies of wrongly rejecting some claims by applying too high standards of evidence to back the claims.

An Allianz spokesman said, however, the Munich-based insurer has been adhering to the criteria agreed by the international commission.

"It is very important for us that all eligible claims are processed quickly and generously," he said. "But it is in the interest of all claimants that we do not settle claims which are not backed by any documentation."

He added that claimants could appeal the insurers’ decisions.

Allianz, France’s AXA, Italy’s General Assicurazioni and Swiss insurers Wintherthur and Zurich Allied which participate in the commission, have all agreed to use relatively undemanding standards of proof because of the special nature of Holocaust claims.

But the commission’s document gives examples of claims that had been rejected under the commission’s fast track process because of too stringent standards applied by insurers.

The paper is part of the record in a California court case in which the European insurers are trying to overturn a state law that requires them to report unpaid Holocaust-era insurance claims.

Neal Sher, the commission’s chief of staff, last week said that under the special fast track process the insurers reviewed more than 500 claims but made only 143 offers. Sher suggested the high rejection rate might mean the insurers were incorrectly applying the commission’s standards.


Calif group pulls $119 mln from fund over Holocaust

06/01/00

LOS ANGELES (Reuters) - A California philanthropic foundation has pulled $119 million from PIMCO Advisors Holdings LP because the U.S. fund manager’s new majority owner, German insurer Allianz AG, refuses to comply with a state law on the Holocaust.

Allan Parachini, a spokesman for the California Community Foundation, said the decision was difficult but morally correct because Allianz has failed to comply with the law requiring insurers to make public lists of unpaid Holocaust-era insurance claims.

Allianz is one of several insurance companies challenging the law in court but it has promised to turn over its archives -- including lists of unpaid claims -- to an international commission which is investigating the issue.

The withdrawal represented about 20 percent of the foundation’s $540 million endowment and is believed to mark the first time a philanthropic group has taken such an action over the Holocaust insurance issue, Parachini said in a telephone interview Thursday.

"We really didn’t see any alternative other than to sever our relationship with them," Parachini said. "We believe this is the first time a large foundation has withdrawn a substantial part of its assets from a money manager over an issue of conscience of this nature."

PIMCO said in a statement that it was "disappointed" with last week’s decision of the nation’s 13th largest
community foundation. The California Community foundation makes donations to community charities.

Allianz acquired a majority share in the Newport Beach, Calif.-based PIMCO in a $3.3 billion deal on May 5 that made the German firm the world's sixth-largest money manager.

It also subjected Pimco to a California law requiring firms to submit lists of unpaid claims from the Holocaust era to the state's insurance commissioner or risk losing their right to do business in the state.

An insurance industry trade group has gone to court to try to block the law on behalf of its members which include Allianz.

"The refusal of Allianz to comply with both the tenets and spirit of California's Holocaust Victim's Insurance Relief Act is in direct opposition to the core values and practices of the California Community Foundation," the foundation's president Jack Shakely said in a May 23 letter to William Thompson, PIMCO's chief executive.

But an Allianz spokesman said his company saw its membership in the international commission charged with trying to track down unpaid Holocaust-era insurance policies as the best way to resolve the issue.

The International Commission on Holocaust Era Claims, headed by former U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, also includes representatives of the World Jewish Congress, Israel and a number of European insurance firms.

"We were disappointed to receive the news but we are committed to the process (of the commission)," Allianz spokesman Christopher Worthley said in a telephone interview.


**Museum Buys Back Nazi Paintings**

06/02/00

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) - The rightful owners of a prized painting stolen by the Nazis have agreed to sell it back to the art museum that returned it to them at a fraction of its estimated value.

The North Carolina Museum of Art will pay $600,000 for the painting "Madonna and Child in a Landscape" by German Renaissance master Lucas Cranach the Elder under terms of an agreement negotiated over six months.

Owned by sisters Marianne and Cornelia Hainisch of Vienna, Austria, the painting's values was estimated at $800,000 to $1.2 million by Sotheby's auction house.

The Gestapo seized the work in 1940 from the sisters' great uncle, Philipp Gomperz, a wealthy Viennese Jew. It was bequeathed to the museum in 1964 after changing hands several times.

The sisters laid claim to the painting last fall, and it was returned to them in February.

They provided the painting back at a reduced cost "as a partial donation because in our opinion the public should know that the heirs of Philipp Gomperz appreciate the sense of justice shown by your decision to restitute the painting."

The sale agreement was praised Thursday as an example of how U.S. art institutions should act when they learn a work in their possession may have been stolen during World War II.

"The North Carolina Museum of Art has been a model in the way they proactively and aggressively sought to do the right thing," said Edward Able, the president and chief executive officer of the American Association of
'Net school teaching Holocaust worldwide
By Charlotte Hallź
Seventh graders who are attending the same "virtual school" to learn about children during the Holocaust met recently at the Yad Layeled children's museum at Kibbutz Lohamei Hageta'ot (Ghetto Fighters House) in Western Galilee. Last week 20 students came from Akron, Ohio, and last month 40 came from the A.J. Heschel School in Manahattan for a real encounter with their respective online pals from Acre's ORT School and Haifa's Ironi Gimmel School.

The contact between the schools is part of an international book project. Students in America and Israel read the same book and through the Internet share their thoughts and reactions to the story, as well as displaying to each other artwork, games and other items that they have created while studying the book.

Twenty pairs of middle schools and four pairs of high schools are participating in the project this year, with the younger children reading the books of award-winning Israeli author and Holocaust survivor Ori Orlev ("The Island on Bird Street" and "The Sand Game") and the older children studying the writings of Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel.

The aim of the project is not only to educate about children's experiences during the Holocaust or Internet technology, says Moshe Shner, director of the Pedagogic Center at the Ghetto Fighters' House, but also "to build a community of learning and multicultural dialogue." Indeed, a perusal of the Web site used by the students reveals that they share not only interest in Alex's fate, but also for MTV stars.

Teacher Karen Shawn conceived the project four years ago while undertaking a book project with her class in New Jersey, and she arranged to link up with an Israeli school. Shawn was recently honored by the Covenant Foundation in the U.S. with its Award for Exceptional Jewish Educators, after being nominated by the Yad Layeled staff.

Not all of the American schools are Jewish, and Israeli participants include the Arab students in Sheikh Danon in the Western Galilee.
WJC: Give Dutch banks 30-day Holocaust deadline

Holocaust heirs want art back from Netherlands


WJC: Give Dutch banks 30-day Holocaust deadline

06/05/00

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, June 5 (Reuters) - The World Jewish Congress on Monday said too little progress in settling Holocaust restitution claims was made at a meeting by Dutch banks and the Amsterdam stock exchange, causing it to renew a call for giving them a 30-day deadline.

The Dutch Jewish community and the financial institutions, at a meeting earlier on Monday, agreed that 12 million guilders was stolen from Dutch Jews during the Nazi-era. In more talks on June 15, the two sides will discuss how much that sum equals in today's values.

"The meeting today, we characterised as not sufficient," Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director, told Reuters. "The people that the banks sent were not at a sufficiently high level to come to an agreement."

Last week, the WJC had asked a group of 900 public finance officials that is led by New York City Comptroller Alan Hevesi to hold off on giving the Dutch financial institutions a 30-day deadline because the WJC wanted to wait for the outcome of Monday's meeting.

"At the suggestion of the Dutch community, we will request the Hevesi committee to go ahead and send out its letter asking for a response within 30 days," Steinberg said.

To keep the pressure on Dutch banks and the Amsterdam bourse, which in 1941 sold securities looted from Jews, Steinberg said he had asked WJC researchers to analyse Dutch holdings in the United States.

Asked if this were a step toward enacting sanctions, such as a boycott, Steinberg replied: "Before we take any such steps we want to have all the information in hand."

Later this week, the WJC will decide whether to try to block ING from acquiring Aetna's international and financial units -- by pressuring Connecticut officials. The No. 1 U.S. health insurer is based in Hartford, Connecticut, and state regulators would have to approve any deal.

Separately, Munich Re, the world's largest reinsurer, late last week said it won a court victory in its bid to buy United National Group of Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania; which has $500 million of assets.

Tom Walker, a spokesman for a U.S. unit, accused the state Department of Insurance of delaying the deal to push the reinsurer into joining a panel probing claims from Holocaust survivors. He said a Pennsylvania court gave the state's Department of Insurance 17 days to approve or disapprove the acquisition of United Group.

Angela Yarbrough, a spokeswoman for the Pennsylvania insurance commissioner, said one of the issues the department examines in any buyout is the competence and integrity of the officers who would gain control.

"We asked legitimate, appropriate questions of the company and believe they were not forthcoming with their information," she said, adding the department might appeal the decision by Judge Joseph Doyle of the Commonwealth Court of Pennsylvania.
Holocaust heirs want art back from Netherlands

Joan Graila
NEW YORK, June 6 (Reuters) - Three heirs of Holocaust victims on Tuesday asked an influential Jewish group to pressure the Netherlands to return art they say the Nazis stole from their families.

The three families, led by Nick Goodman Gutmann, Marei von Saher and Christine Koenigs, told Reuters they hoped that the World Jewish Congress, which is pushing Dutch banks and the Amsterdam bourse to make restitution for bank accounts and securities looted from Jews, will take on their cause.

In a letter to the WJC obtained by Reuters, the three individuals wrote: "They (government officials) totally reject and ignore the context and circumstances of 1939 and the period before and during the German invasion and hide under the pretext that all was normal and what happened to Gutmann, Jacques Goudstikker and Koenigs was perfectly legal and the Dutch Museums should not be disturbed."

A spokesman for the Netherlands government was not immediately available to comment.

After the war, the Allies returned art looted by the Nazis to the nations from which it was taken; it was left to those governments to give the works back to the individual Holocaust heirs who were robbed.

Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director, said the advocacy group planned to meet with the three families so that it can decide what it might do.

Goudstikker, an art dealer who fled Amsterdam ahead of the Nazi invasion in 1940 -- leaving more than 1,200 paintings behind, died en route to England. A post-war, declassified report by the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) said Alois Miedl, whom it called a Bavarian financier, bought the Goudstikker collection.

Miedl, a friend of Hermann Goering, Hitler's air minister, negotiated the sale of the Goudstikker art for Goering, according to a September 1946 Atlantic Monthly article by James Plaut, who had served as the Director of Art for the OSS Art Looting Investigation Unit.

Von Saher of Greenwich, Connecticut, said: "Goering picked the best ones." She explained Miedl took the rest, which now are scattered in public and private collections from Russia to the United States.

Goudstikker's widow, Desi, in 1952 reached a settlement with the Netherlands government but the family argues its claims for some 235 works remain open. A court in The Hague late last year held that a suit the family filed was inadmissible, saying the earlier settlement closed the case.

Christine Koenigs of Amsterdam said that her grandfather, Franz Koenigs, owned more than 2,100 old master drawings, four paintings by Hieronymus Bosch, and works by Rubens, van Gogh and Cezanne. The banker died in mysterious circumstances on May 1941 in Cologne, his granddaughter said. The drawings were claimed as collateral against an outstanding loan -- and the bank was said to have changed the security to include all drawings of the French group and all the works on loan to the Dutch Boymans museum.

After the war, Franz Koenigs' widow claimed 47 paintings from the Netherlands, a claim she said was ignored.

Nick Goodman Gutmann of California said that research done by Dutch officials turned up 9 to 12 paintings that belonged to his grandfather, who perished, along with his wife, in Nazi death camps. The grandfather, whose father converted to Protestantism from Judaism, was forced to sell the contents of his home to Karl Haberstock - perhaps the most notorious Nazi art dealer.
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Nazi Loot

Michael Dobbs's May 20 front-page story, "Suspicion Hangs in U.S. Museums," highlighted the problems of determining the Nazi-era provenance of paintings now in U.S. museums and the differences in approach that various museums are taking to address these problems.

A U.S. government body, the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States, is charged with making policy recommendations to the president regarding these and other issues relating to assets of Holocaust victims in the United States.

It was as a result of its cooperation with the commission that the National Gallery of Art decided to make its provenance database searchable by the name of art dealers, a major benefit to scholars and claimants seeking to identify looted works.

The commission also has sought to convey to the public an aspect of this issue not addressed in The Post's story: that the looting by the Nazis of museum-quality paintings was only the tip of an iceberg of looting of cultural property.

For every Leger, Picasso and Klimt taken by the Nazis, hundreds of thousands of religious objects, books, antiques and other cultural assets were looted. Most of these will never be identified and returned to their original owners or their heirs.

But their loss constitutes an important part of the story of the systematic theft of cultural heritage engineered by the Nazis and their collaborators.

EDGAR M. BRONFMAN
Washington

The writer is chairman of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States.
Nazi Loot

Britons fight to win fair share of Nazi slave fund

Nazi slaves face cash cut

Britons fight to win fair share of Nazi slave fund

LONDON, June 9 (Reuters) - A lawyer fighting for compensation for Britons who toiled as slave labourers for Nazi Germany expressed pessimism on Friday that they will receive their fair share.

"The money... for British claimants is only about half the amount that's being set aside for others and this they feel is quite..."
outrageous," lawyer Martin Day, a representative of some 1,000 British slave camp survivors, told BBC radio.

"There was a degree of commitment from the Germans, but I remain worried that the money is not readily visible."

A landmark settlement reached last year with German industry and government is expected to compensate 240,000 surviving slave labourers with between 5,300 and 15,000 marks ($2,588-$7,324) each.

Some of Germany's biggest companies and the German government have pledged a combined 10 billion marks ($4.88 billion) to slave labourers who built roads, cleared rubble and toiled in German factories during the War.

But Britons and some other nationals have been allocated only half the amount offered to east European slave survivors.

"We were refused access to direct negotiations," Day said.

"It's clear that that three billion pounds was divided between those who were able to get access to the German negotiators so that basically the British have been stiffed out of the deal," he said.

Actual payments and a final agreement with slave labourers from all countries have faced delays, however, over German industry's concerns it could still face lawsuits after the settlement.

The chief U.S. negotiator, Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat has said he remains hopeful a final agreement on all payments can be reached in talks on June 12 in Washington.

But Day warned that when the payments are made, they should be made to all survivors equally.

"I can assure you that if this agreement is not reached on equality there will be concern expressed very strongly not just here but everywhere else in the world." ($1-2.048 Mark)

Friday, 9 June, 2000

BBC News

Nazi slaves face cash cut

Former Nazi slave labourers forced to work for German industry during the war are said to be furious about plans to cut their agreed sum of compensation.

The German Government, which after lengthy negotiations agreed to pay claimants a settlement of £3bn last December, now says it has to reduce the amount.

German industry is said to be struggling to raise the money pledged to one million former slave labourers, which was to be more than doubled by a contribution from the government.

Now representatives of British claimants are returning from talks in Berlin saying they have been betrayed.

Their lawyer Martin Day, who gave evidence before a German parliamentary committee, said the money allocated for around 1000 British slave workers had been halved.

He accused the Germans of talking publicly about fairness while "stitching up" the British behind the scenes.

The president of the Federation of Poles in Great Britain said Germany was "trying to humiliate" his members.

Moral responsibility

Although Germany has compensated the victims of war crimes, it has never provided for the estimated 12 million people put to work by Adolf Hitler's regime.

In a bid to encourage other German contributors, fund organisers published a list of 2,000 supporting companies, including German industrial giants Siemens, Volkswagen and Daimler Chrysler which benefited from slave and forced labourers during World War II.
Double-page newspaper adverts appealed to firms not on the list to acknowledge their moral responsibility and join the fund.

The contributors are not necessarily firms who employed slave labour or were active in Germany at the time of the Nazi regime.

The original deal for compensation was brokered by the German and American governments late last year.
Austria Lake Nazi Relics Sought

For Jews' lives, gold was given -- and lost

Insurance

Calif. Judge Blocks Holocaust Act

Slave Labor

Claims Conference demands legal immunity from lawsuits

General

Nazi Hunter: Assad Death a Relief

US, Austrian officials meet on Nazi-era claims


Austria Lake Nazi Relics Sought

June 10, 2000

VIENNA, Austria (AP) - A diving robot began recording the bottom of a mountain lake Saturday, as part of a U.S.-led search for Nazi documents and relics believed hidden beneath the waters since the end of World War II.

Using video-sonar, the robot known as "Phantom" is recording the floor of Lake Topliz, which measures 420 yards by 2,280 yards and up to 125 yards deep at some points, the Austria Press Agency reported.

Since the end of World War II, speculation has persisted that the lake might contain anything from documents to Nazi gold dumped by the Germans in the last days of the war.

During the first phase of the search, which is expected to last about 30 days, the robot connected by cable to a tent beside the lake will record and analyze data, APA said. Divers are prepared to go down only if something interesting is located.

Several previous searches at the lake 100 miles southwest of Vienna have revealed nothing more spectacular than remnants of experimental weapons and crates of counterfeit British bank notes, manufactured apparently in an attempt to weaken the English currency.

Still, none of the previous attempts has been as technologically sophisticated as the newest search, conducted by the U.S. salvage firm Ocean Engineering and financed primarily by CBS, the American television network.

CBS plans to make a documentary of the search. Also involved in financing and other aspects are the World Jewish Congress and the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles.
FOR JEWS' LIVES, GOLD WAS GIVEN--AND LOST

By Ron Grossman
June 11, 2000

In 1944 a group of Hungarian Jews destined for Auschwitz struck an extraordinary deal with the Nazis. They paid a $2 million ransom in gold and precious stones in exchange for their lives.

For half a century, the dramatic story, unique in the annals of the Holocaust, remained largely unknown except to the 1,684 men, women and children who were transported to safety in neutral Switzerland, just as 500,000 other Hungarian Jews were being sent to the gas chambers. It was the largest single group of Jews spared--far outnumbering those saved by Oskar Schindler and made famous by the Steven Spielberg movie--but the fate of the ransom has never been determined; only a small portion was ever accounted for.

Now, in an unusual move, the U.S. government has opened an investigation into what happened to the money--and the possibility of American involvement in its disappearance. Meanwhile, the Tribune has found and interviewed two former GIs involved in the event who have yet to be contacted by the U.S. government.

Until now, the incident has been essentially a footnote in history texts. After World War II, the Hungarian Jews involved in the "gold for lives" swap scattered to various countries.

Of course the Nazis could and did appropriate the assets of many Jews before sending them to death. The unusual proposal to free Jews in exchange for their assets, according to historical accounts, grew out of a larger deal proposed by Nazi leader Adolf Eichmann to gain desperately needed war materials from abroad in exchange for sparing Jews.

That larger deal never happened, but the ransom of the Hungarian Jews is now viewed as a sort of pilot project by which the Nazis hoped to demonstrate that they could be trusted to free Jews for a price.

According to documents and survivor accounts now being analyzed by the government, the survivors didn't know that in the closing days of the war, their valuables had been turned over to an intelligence unit of the U.S. Army and that, either before or after the GIs received them, the cache drastically shrunk. The value of the cache inventoried after V-E Day was estimated to be in the thousands, not millions, of dollars.

"Who would have thunk it?" asked Eugene Sofer, deputy director of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets in the United States, recalling his surprise when the issue landed on his desk. "Our mandate stops with what happened to the assets, but the whole episode is a fascinating, obscure chapter in Holocaust history."

The story--of Jews and Nazis bargaining on the basis of mutual interest, of an SS officer trying to return the Jews' valuables, and of the possible involvement of a Jewish official in the disappearance of the valuables--reads more like a movie script than a history text.

The Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets, established in 1998, was charged by Congress with investigating the disposition of Holocaust victims' property that came into the possession of U.S. authorities. In a widely publicized report issued last year, the panel charged that an American general had expropriated possessions of death camp victims to furnish the Austrian villa that served as his living quarters.

According to Sofer, the results of the panel's current investigation will be announced as part of its final report, to be published in December. Sofer said the commission's investigators are researching the voluminous military
records deposited in U.S. government archives after World War II, as well as contemporary records of the Jewish agencies involved and those of the FBI.

He also said investigators representing the present-day Hungarian Jewish community have been trying to track down the missing valuables and have come to Washington to compare notes with the commission's researchers.

The federal government was prompted to launch its investigation by a letter to the editor of The New York Times in April, briefly recalling the incident. The writer, Egon Mayer, argued that in the wake of other revelations about exploitation of Jews during World War II, someone should look into the disappearance of the Hungarian Jews' riches.

Mayer has a double interest in the gold-for-lives swap. He is a professor of Jewish studies at City University of New York, and the 1944 deal allowed his parents to escape the death camps.

"I was born shortly after my mother and father arrived in Switzerland," Mayer said. "I can date my professional interest in the subject to 'Schindler's List.'"

Mayer noted that while Schindler's effort to save Jews during World War II is widely celebrated, the ransom of the Hungarian Jews is virtually unknown. Yet it enabled far more people to escape than the 997 Jews Schindler saved. In addition to those who reached safety in Switzerland, 15,000 more Hungarian Jews were diverted from Auschwitz to a labor camp, in anticipation of future "blood for goods" deals, as the Nazis called the business.

The convergence of two wartime developments set the stage for the unprecedented bargain between the Jews and the Nazis.

By 1944, Hungarian Jews, who had largely escaped the gas chambers, were being sent to Auschwitz. The Soviet armies, meanwhile, were gaining the upper hand on the European eastern front. With Germany desperate for war materiel to stem the Russian advance, Eichmann, the infamous architect of the Holocaust, proposed a swap to leaders of the Hungarian Jewish community, according to widely accepted historical accounts: He would spare Jewish lives in exchange for 10,000 trucks from abroad, armaments that the Nazi war effort could no longer produce.

The Western Allies, though, were reluctant to equip their opponents, despite German assurances that the trucks would be used only against the Russians, and ultimately the bargain fell through. But while diplomats and statesmen were still debating it, contemporary documents show, another SS officer, Lt. Col. Kurt Becher, suggested a kind of pilot project to Rudolf Kasztner, a Hungarian Jewish official.

Kasztner would select some of his fellow Jews to be sent to Switzerland if the group, which eventually numbered 1,684, would put up the equivalent of $2 million as a sort of earnest money, pending the larger exchange of trucks for Jewish lives.

Becher, according to various accounts, hoped to make a good-faith demonstration that the Nazis could be trusted to spare lives in exchange for war materials.

Jacob Jungreis was 11 and his family was already on the way to the gas chambers when they were chosen to be part of Kasztner's party.

"We were being deported to Auschwitz via Budapest," recalled Rabbi Jungreis, who now heads a yeshiva, a religious academy, in New York. "Then German officers got on the train and said: 'The rabbi and his family should get off.'"

His father was a distinguished Talmudic scholar, Jungreis said, which is probably why they were chosen. Kasztner picked not only the wealthy, who could contribute to the ransom, but also rabbis and intellectuals, as if determined to create a pool from which the Hungarian Jewish community might be reborn. Jungreis and the others were taken to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in Germany, and from there transported to
Switzerland in December 1944.

Next spring, Nikolaus Mosche Schweiger, another Jewish official, was taken from his cell block in the Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. According to an affidavit Schweiger gave to the U.S. military after the war, he was given a shower, clean clothing and his first decent food in months, then taken before Col. Becher.

When Schweiger told the SS man that he knew Kasztner, Schweiger was then informed of the ransom of the Hungarian Jews. With the war about to end, there was no possibility of further deals, Becher explained, and he wanted to return the ransom. He then presented several boxes of gold and jewels to Schweiger, asking him to get them to Kasztner in Switzerland.

"I found myself in a rather uncomfortable position," Schweiger wrote in a letter at that time. Fearing he would be either robbed or accused of looting by the advancing Allies, he found an American Army intelligence unit and turned over the riches Becher had given him.

The unit was commanded by Lt. Russell Slater, who later died. But Felix Adler, now a New York advertising executive, remembers serving under Slater. A few years ago, while researching the episode, professor Mayer contacted Adler.

Adler recalled in an interview with the Tribune that the lieutenant brought a box into their quarters and opened it, revealing a great quantity of valuables. Slater asked Adler and another member of the unit what they thought should be done with it. The others wanted to divide the windfall three ways. Slater said he felt bound by honor to turn over the cache to the military police.

"I said: 'That's crazy,'" Adler recalled. "'If we don't take the stuff, the MPs surely will.'"

According to contemporary documents, the American military deposited the valuables received from Schweiger in a nearby Austrian bank. Several years later, Kasztner made inquiries of the U.S. military and was able to track the valuables to the bank. When Jewish officials finally retrieved the goods, their value was estimated at between $55,000 and $65,000.

Beyond the possibility that the balance had fallen into some GIs' hands, one Jewish official concluded in a contemporary memo: "It is clear that Becher had handed over to Mr. Mosche Schweiger only an extraordinarily small part of those valuables, which had been handed over in Hungary by Jews in order to be allowed to emigrate."

Supporting that hypothesis, Mayer notes, is the fact that after the war, Becher emerged as a very successful businessman. Although Becher was taken before the Nuremberg war crimes trials, where he testified against other Nazis, he escaped punishment.

Becher, now dead, had offered another explanation for the missing money when he was taken into custody at the war's end. Richard Essex, a German-speaking member of a U.S. intelligence unit, was the first American soldier to interview Becher. Becher told Essex about the gold-for-lives swap. Asked where the money was, Becher said he had sent much of it to a Jewish official in Switzerland, offering the man's phone number to verify his account.

"My commanding officer and I drove straight to Switzerland and called the guy, Saly Mayer, from the border," recalled Essex, who is retired in Florida. "Mayer said: 'Don't talk about such things by phone. I'll be right there to see you.'"

Essex says Saly Mayer, who is now deceased, took the two GIs to St. Gallen, Switzerland, where he resisted all their efforts to get his version of the affair.

"Mayer was evasive and broke down crying," Essex said. "Just before we left, when it was already 2 in the
morning, he knocked on the window of a jewelry store, until the owner opened up. He bought my captain and me expensive watches, "as a little present," he said.

Essex—who like Adler has not been contacted by the presidential commission—assumes that Saly Mayer got much of Becher's treasure and that some of the rest was purloined by GIs. Egon Mayer thinks it's possible that Saly Mayer (no relation) did get some of the ransom, but doubts he pocketed it. Egon Mayer thinks Saly Mayer would have used the money to feed the many Jewish refugees wandering Europe at the war's end, or to help finance the coming struggle for Israel's independence.

Even Kasztner, a hero to those he saved, wasn't above suspicion in the aftermath of the affair. He immigrated to Israel, and after he went into politics, a right-wing journalist launched an attack against him as a Nazi collaborator. "I have been waiting for the moment to unmask this careerist," Malkiel Grunwald wrote, "who grew fat on Hitler's plunder and murders."

In 1957, three assassins shot Kasztner outside his home in Tel Aviv.

Now it is up to the presidential commission to sort through the suspects and conflicting theories in the case of the missing jewels and gold.

Kasztner observed in a memo to superiors half a century ago: "What happened to the rest could be the subject of an investigation—for history."

Calif. Judge Blocks Holocaust Act

June 10, 2000

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) - A federal judge temporarily blocked California's Holocaust Victim Insurance Relief Act, which would require insurers to report policies sold in Europe before 1945.

The law would allow state regulators to suspend the licenses of insurance companies that do not honor valid claims by Holocaust survivors and the heirs of those who died.

However, U.S. District Judge William B. Shubb ruled Friday that the 1999 law could interfere with the federal government's control over foreign policy and commerce. He ordered the state not to enforce the law until the court decides whether it is unconstitutional.

"None of the plaintiffs deny that the Holocaust was a terrible atrocity," Shubb wrote. "And none of the plaintiffs deny that the victims and their heirs and beneficiaries should be compensated ... (but) this goal may not be achieved through unconstitutional means."

Insurance companies said the law was preempted when the United States entered into talks with Germany to resolve Holocaust reparations. Industry lawyers also maintain the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims works to settle cases.

An outside counsel representing the state insurance department, Frank Kaplan, would not comment on the judge's action because he had not seen the order.


Jerusalem Post

Claims Conference demands legal immunity from lawsuits
NEW YORK (June 11) - German industry is not the only one clamoring for "legal peace" for itself as the price of the DM 10 billion German slave-labor initiative. The Claims Conference, which concluded agreements for Holocaust-era slave-labor compensation some 30 years ago, is also now insisting on legal immunity from lawsuits by German companies.

The Claims Conference's position is the latest obstacle for the fund, which is to be financed equally by the German government and industry.

Negotiations resume tomorrow in Washington between German industry, the German government, the Claims Conference, lawyers representing Nazi-era laborers, and the US and Central and Eastern European governments.

German companies announced the slave-labor fund in February 1999. Although they called the fund a humanitarian initiative, industry has insisted that the US government intervene to suppress the class-action lawsuits in US federal courts that are demanding compensation from German industry for Nazi-era claims.

A final agreement on the fund has been delayed because German industry contended that the extent and legal value of the proposed American intervention was insufficient.

Now the Claims Conference is chiming in. "Our position is that we are simply seeking the same legal peace that the companies are seeking," said Claims Conference Director Gideon Taylor. "We believe that if legal peace is to be part of this agreement, we want legal peace on all sides."

The Claims Conference apparently fears that it will be sued by German companies over decades-old agreements it made with a handful of German companies for slave-labor claims. A condition of the companies' payments at the time was that the Claims Conference would indemnify them against all future claims.

There has been no public suggestion by German companies that the Claims Conference honors the indemnification clauses.

Nonetheless, the Claims Conference's lawyers sent a letter to German industry asking for an indemnification waiver, and stating that if such a waiver was not given it would not support the DM 10b. slave-labor fund.

"These agreements raise some legal issues as to potential liabilities that some companies could take against the Claims Conference," Taylor said Thursday. "We don't believe there is any liability."

A spokesman for German industry declined to comment on the Claims Conference's letter.

Nazi Hunter: Assad Death 'Relief'

PARIS (AP) - The death of Syrian President Hafez Assad could help determine what happened to a Nazi war crimes suspect believed to have lived in Syria, French Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld said Sunday.

"From a moral standpoint ... I would say it is a relief to see Assad’s departure to another world and a possibility to know the truth" about Nazi war criminal suspect Alois Brunner, Klarsfeld said on France Info radio.

Assad, Syria's leader for 30 years, died Saturday.

A French court ruled in December that it would try Brunner in absentia for allegedly deporting 250 Jewish children to Auschwitz, where they died.

Brunner, one of the world's most-wanted Nazi war criminals, is believed to have lived for years in Syria. France
requested his extradition, but Assad said that, to his knowledge, Brunner was not in the country.

Brunner's whereabouts have been a nagging issue in French-Syria relations.

Klarsfeld said that Assad's death ahead of Brunner's upcoming trial could help determine if Brunner "was still alive or in what conditions he lived."

"We will know the truth one day," said Klarsfeld, head of the Association of Sons and Daughters of Deported Jews of France. "The Assad regime has been prejudicial from all moral standpoints."

Brunner served as a top aide to Adolf Eichmann, the overseer of the Nazi death machine. He allegedly helped organize the deportation and murder of at least 130,000 Jews from Germany, Austria, France and Greece.

In 1987, the German news weekly Bunte published an interview with photographs of Brunner - then alias Georg Fischer - outside his Syrian villa. Investigations since then have been unable to determine if Brunner was still alive. If so, he would be in his late 80s.

**US, Austrian officials meet on Nazi-era claims**

WASHINGTON, June 7 (Reuters) - U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat said "excellent progress" was made on Wednesday in a fresh round of meetings with Austrian officials to discuss restitution claims from Jews and others persecuted by the Nazis during the Second World War.

After the meetings, which took place at the U.S. State Department in Washington and lasted longer than anticipated, Eizenstat cited real progress.

"We made excellent progress today in our meeting with the Austrian delegation and in a separate meeting with the plaintiffs' attorneys," said Eizenstat, who last month warned that Austria's handling of the Holocaust issue would be crucial for relations between the two countries.

Eizenstat said the U.S. government was pleased with changes agreed to Austrian legislation creating the Austrian Reconciliation Fund, to be capitalised at 6 billion Schilling, or $400 million, and said they addressed U.S. concerns.

But he said it was important for Austria to take into account the concerns of Jews and others seeking restitution from Austria for property seized by the Nazis as part of a so-called "Aryanization" programme.

Austrian officials assured U.S. officials that the capitalisation of the fund would be adequate to handle the expected number of claims, Eizenstat said. He said attorneys for the plaintiffs were now considering the amount.

The officials said the draft law had support from the four parties in the Austrian parliament and they expected it to be approved in July.

Given progress on the Austrian legislation, both countries had agreed to begin work on an executive agreement and the elements of a statement of interest "to achieve legal peace for the Austrian companies," Eizenstat said.

Eizenstat welcomed the appointment last month of Ernst Sucharipa as Austria's special envoy for Nazi-era claims, and said he would meet with him in Washington on June 19.

Sucharipa, Austria's former ambassador to the United Nations, also plans to meet with the victims' attorneys when he is in the United States.

Eizenstat also praised the professionalism of Maria Schaumayer, the special envoy put in charge of negotiations on compensating Nazi-era slave and forced labourers.

Austria, part of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich from 1938 to 1945, has passed a series of restitution laws since World War Two but there has never been a comprehensive settlement.
Tuesday June 13 8:56 AM ET

Nazi Slaves Deal Still Leaves Questions Open

By Daniel Simpson

BERLIN (Reuters) - A German lawyer warned on Tuesday that a key deal paving the way for a 10 billion mark ($4.9 billion) fund to compensate Nazi-era slaves and forced workers could still leave German firms open to fresh lawsuits.

U.S. and German negotiators cleared a major obstacle to setting up the fund after 10 hours of talks in Washington on Monday, providing assurances that U.S. courts would dismiss claims from people the Nazis forced to work during World War II.

German companies welcomed the agreement, which answered fears they might end up paying more than one million survivors of concentration camps and forced labor schemes twice.

"Payments to the victims can now be speedily set in motion," said Joerg Allgauer, a spokesman for insurance giant Allianz AG, a founding member of the industry compensation fund. But Michael Witti, part of a legal team representing Nazi-era slave workers, told Reuters that German companies' desire to restrict the settlement to forced laborers left them open to fresh claims for the looting of assets by firms during the Nazis' "Aryanization" of the German economy.

"They're going to get the bill for that in the shape of new suits," Witti said.

Lawyers for Holocaust victims said they would also continue an $18 billion lawsuit against Austria because plans to settle claims by forced workers and people whose property was stolen were inadequate.

Breakthrough Deal But Only First Step

Monday's deal sets out arrangements for what the negotiators call "legal peace" for the German companies, but it now requires approval by German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, individual German companies, the German parliament and the class-action trial lawyers who have already filed suits for compensation.

Both U.S. and German officials were nonetheless pleased a key barrier had been cleared, raising hopes after 18 months of talks that surviving victims, about 240,000 former slave laborers and one million forced laborers, would be paid soon.

"A major hurdle to agreement on the historic German initiative dealing with wrongs arising from World War II has now been overcome," President Clinton said.

Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat said that under the agreement the U.S. administration has drafted a "statement of interest" for submission to any U.S. court hearing a suit.

The statement says the German fund, which the U.S. says would compensate many more people than could win litigation, should be the exclusive remedy for claims on German companies and that it is in the foreign policy interest of the United States that the court dismiss the cases, Eizenstat said.
The plan is that all 55 outstanding lawsuits be consolidated into a single case which a U.S. court would then dismiss on the basis of Monday’s agreement, he said.

But Witti said it was important for surviving victims to be aware that payments from the fund would not begin immediately.

Germany’s lower house of parliament still has to approve the necessary legislation, due for debate this month, before payouts can be made and German firms are still 1.9 billion marks short of the five million marks they agreed to contribute to the fund.

Chief German negotiator Otto Lambsdorff has accused firms of using the legal dispute as a “lazy pretext” not to pay up.

However industry representative Manfred Gentz, the chief financial officer of DaimlerChrysler AG, said the agreement would help persuade German firms make up the shortfall.

With available tax breaks, the government will end up footing about three-quarters of the final bill, rather than the 50-50 split between 2,553 firms and the state that was agreed.

Eizenstat said he expected all parties to the deal, including the governments of Belarus, Israel, Poland, Russia, Ukraine and the Czech Republic and organizations representing Jewish survivors, to convene in Berlin in the middle of July.

Monday June 12 9:52 PM ET

Argentina to Apologize for Holocaust Role

By Hugh Bronstein

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The country that sheltered Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi who directed the murder of millions of European Jews, plans to apologize on Tuesday for its role in the Holocaust, a spokesman for Argentina President Fernando de la Rua confirmed.

Argentina has been praised by Jewish leaders for efforts, begun in 1992 under former President Carlos Menem, to cleanse itself of the stains on its past linked to its post-war role, when it gave refuge to at least 180 Nazis and collaborators. These included Dr. Joseph Mengele, the Auschwitz doctor whose experiments on prisoners earned him the name “Angel of Death.”

But de la Rua, at a New York news conference, showed no inclination to apologize for Argentina’s actions during World War II, when Juan Peron, a Nazi sympathizer, was the power behind the scenes.

Asked whether Argentina was the regional hub for the Nazis’ financial ties to Latin America during the war, de la Rua told reporters: “I have never heard anything about that.” He added: “I am making reference to the period after the war ... when Nazi criminals were allowed into our country.”

Argentina has 36 million people, 300,000 of whom are Jews, making this community the seventh largest in the world. De la Rua, a former congressman who authored an anti-discrimination law, continued: “It is necessary to apologize for what happened and pay tribute to the victims of the Holocaust.”

In February, 1945, the U.S. Treasury Secretary wrote the Secretary of State: “More recent reports indicate clearly that Argentina is not only a likely refuge for Nazi criminals but also has been and still is the focal point of Nazi financial and economic activity in this hemisphere.” Germany formally surrendered in Rheims on May
7, 1945. The declassified letter was provided to Reuters by the World Jewish Congress, an advocacy group.

De la Rua is a member of the centrist Radical party, while Peronists control the Senate and 13 out of 24 provinces, according to a spokesman for the president.

Peron became president in 1946, and one year later, his wife, "Evita" Peron, went to Europe. There has long been speculation in financial and diplomatic circles that during that trip she helped Nazis who had sought shelter in Argentina to launder their gold.

The WJC hailed the way Argentina confronted its past. Elan Steinberg, referring to the Commission of Inquiry into the Activities of Nazism in Argentina, told Reuters: "I want to stress the Argentine commission is an example for other countries to follow, and has been unflinching in its efforts to get at the truth."

He added: "Its own investigative commission revealed what was long known -- that the Peronist government was sympathetic to fascist ideology and that the Nazis as well as Nazi assets found safe haven in the country after the war."

Steinberg, who along with WJC president, Edgar Bronfman, met on Monday with de la Rua, said Argentina's president told them that last Friday he signed a decree creating a special investigative unit to help a federal judge probe an anti-Jewish attack in which 86 people were killed in 1994. In the car-bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center, some 200 people were wounded.

Jerusalem Post

Honoring the baron who saved Jewish lives

By Etgar Lefkovits (June 13) - Baron Alfred von Oppenheim thinks back to the spring day in 1945, when as a 10-year-old boy he was bicycling with his mother on the lonely dirt roads of rural Germany mapping out the escape route they were planning for his father, Baron Friedrich Carl von Oppenheim, who had been imprisoned by the Gestapo the year before for helping Jews escape the Nazis. The boy and his mother, herself recently released from prison, had to take cover in ditches to hide from American planes bombing Germany in the waning days of World War II. Fortunately, the Americans would soon liberate the prison in Landshut, 60 kilometers east of Munich, where his father was being held, leaving no need for them to carry out the rescue plan. Now, 55 years later, Baron Friedrich Carl von Oppenheim's son and grandson are in Jerusalem for the annual Oppenheim symposium at Yad Vashem which is dedicated in his memory. In 1996, Baron Friedrich was posthumously honored by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Gentile. Throughout the war, von Oppenheim used his privileged status as co-owner of one of Germany's major banks to save Jews from the Holocaust in both Germany and Holland. He was arrested by the Gestapo in 1944 and imprisoned for these activities. In fact, von Oppenheim was considered suspect by the Nazis from the outset, as his grandfather was of Jewish origin. "His name, his profession as a banker, and the fact that he travelled frequently out of Germany were all negatives against him in the eyes of the Nazis," says his son, Baron Alfred. Alfred never heard from his father what he had done during the war. "For all the years, he never talked about it," he says. "We, the children, knew nothing about it."

The children learned of Baron Friedrich's story from the people he rescued. "My father knew that the Nazis were evil, and because his bank was based in Germany he knew what was going on. Still, he did not have access to Hitler so he could not shoot him. But as a banker, he used the means at his disposal - his money, his reputation, and his contacts - to help the Jews that he could," says Baron Alfred. Before he was imprisoned by the Germans, Baron Friedrich Carl von Oppenheim succeeded in getting some 20 Jews out of Germany and Holland, and attempted to save dozens more. By 1943, the SS were suspicious of his activities and forbade him from travelling outside of Germany. "People heard of him by word of mouth," recalls Baron Alfred, "he would deliver messages, food, and packages to Jews in concentration camps... and, placing himself in considerable
danger would even succeed in getting several Jews out of the camps." Baron Friedrich had smuggled information about the gas chambers to the British secret service, but his information was considered just a provocation by the British. In August 1944, he was arrested together with his wife at their home in Bavaria. His wife was released six months later. The SS authorities wanted him transferred to Berlin to stand trial there, but the Germans in charge of the local prison did not follow through on the orders they received. In fact, the family had an arrangement with the head of the prison that if the baron was really in danger, he would be released and given a bicycle to escape to the countryside. After the war, Baron Friedrich resumed his banking business, which has now been in the family for over seven generations.


CHRONOLOGY-Key dates in Nazi-era slave labour talks

BERLIN, June 13 (Reuters) - The following is a chronology of compensation talks between Germany and representatives of Nazi-era slave and forced labourers after an agreement reached in Washington on future legal protection for German companies.

1939-1945 - Nazi Germany rounds up some 12 million people from Nazi-occupied lands stretching from Norway to North Africa and forces them to work for the war economy. A smaller amount of mostly Jewish victims are taken to concentration camps to be worked to death -- the so-called "slave labourers."

1953-99 - West Germany, and after 1990 reunited Germany, pays over 104 billion marks ($51 billion) to Nazi victims according to a 1953 Compensation Law. Bilateral agreements signed with more than a dozen countries set up pensions and annuities for victims in western Europe.

1998 - Switzerland's top banks, threatened with huge damage claims and economic boycotts by several U.S. states, agree to pay $1.25 billion to settle unreturned assets to Holocaust survivors. The settlement prompts several top German firms to come forward and say they would set up restitution fund.

1998 - Volkswagen AG agrees to compensate its former forced labourers. Gerhard Schroeder, then state premier in VW's home state of Lower Saxony and candidate for chancellor, is a member of the Volkswagen AG supervisory board.

1998 - Schroeder defeats incumbent Chancellor Helmut Kohl, who had ruled out any further payments to Nazi-era survivors.

February 1999 - A group of 12 leading German companies, including Volkswagen, set up the "Memory, Responsibility, and Future Fund." Its aim is to raise funds from German companies to offer to surviving forced labourers.

August 1999 - First deadline for deal missed. Germany offers about three billion marks ($1.5 billion), lawyers representing victims demand $20 billion. Germany had hoped to have settlement before September 1, the 60th anniversary of the Nazi invasion of Poland which sparked World War Two.

October 1999 - Talks in Washington adjourned after failing to reach agreement. About 35 German companies now participating in the fund. Germany offers six billion marks, including four billion marks from firms and two billion from the government.

November 1999 - Talks in Bonn come closer to a deal but still fail to reach agreement. German offer raised to eight billion marks -- five billion from the 50 companies now in the fund and three billion from the government.

December 1999 - Parties involved seal agreement in principle on a settlement worth 10 billion marks ($4.9 billion).
March 2000 - Agreement is reached on how the compensation should be allocated with 8.25 billion marks to be paid in individual compensation and the remainder to cover property losses and other projects.

June 2000 - Restitution fund has raised three billion marks out of its target of five billion. Deal reached for U.S. government to make a "statement of interest" recommending courts not to admit further lawsuits against German firms seeking compensation for victims of forced and slave labour.

($1-2.043 Mark)


Nazi slaves deal could leave loopholes—lawyer

Daniel Simpson

BERLIN, June 13 (Reuters) - A German lawyer warned on Tuesday that a key deal paving the way for a 10-billion mark ($4.9 billion) fund to compensate Nazi-era slaves and forced workers could still leave German firms open to fresh lawsuits.

U.S. and German negotiators cleared a big obstacle to setting up the fund after 10-hour talks in Washington on Monday, providing assurances that U.S. courts would dismiss claims from people the Nazis forced to work during World War Two.

German companies welcomed the agreement, which answered fears they might end up paying more than one million survivors of concentration camps and forced-labour schemes twice.

"From our point of view the fund could still begin payments this year," German industry spokesman Wolfgang Gibowski said.

But Michael Witti, part of a legal team representing Nazi-era slaves, told Reuters that the German companies’ desire to restrict the settlement to forced labourers left them open to fresh claims for the looting of assets by firms during the Nazis’ "Aryanisation" of the German economy.

"They’re going to get the bill for that in the shape of new suits," Witti said.

Gibowski said however that Monday’s deal covered all claims on German firms to atone for their behaviour under the Nazis.

"We haven’t just dealt with the problem of forced labourers in our actions but also with those of Aryanisation," he told Hesse state radio in an interview.

Austria also dismissed criticism by class-action lawyers, who plan an $18 billion suit on behalf of forced workers and those whose property was looted under Nazi occupation. Austria could now begin compensation payouts within months after the U.S.-German deal, its Nazi issues envoy Maria Schaumayer said.

BREAKTHROUGH DEAL BUT ONLY FIRST STEP

Monday’s deal sets out arrangements for what the negotiators call "legal peace" for the German companies. But it now requires approval by German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, individual German companies, the German parliament and the class-action trial lawyers who have already filed suits for compensation.

Both U.S. and German officials were nonetheless pleased a key barrier had been cleared, raising hopes after 18 months of talks that surviving victims, about 240,000 former slave labourers and one million forced labourers, would be paid soon.

"A major hurdle to agreement on the historic German initiative dealing with wrongs arising from World War Two has now been overcome," U.S. President Bill Clinton said.

Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat said that under the agreement the U.S. administration has drafted a "statement of interest" for submission to any U.S. court hearing a suit.

The statement says the German fund, which the U.S. says would compensate many more people than could win litigation, should be the exclusive remedy for claims on German companies and that it is in the foreign policy interest of the United States that the court dismiss the cases, Eizenstat said.
The plan is that all 55 outstanding lawsuits be consolidated into a single case which a U.S. court would then dismiss on the basis of Monday's agreement, he said.

But Witti said it was important for surviving victims to be aware that payments from the fund would not begin immediately.

Germany's lower house of parliament still has to approve the necessary legislation, due for debate this month, before payouts can be made and German firms are still 1.9 billion marks short of the five million marks they agreed to contribute to the fund.

Chief German negotiator Otto Lambsdorff has accused firms of using the legal dispute as a "lazy pretext" not to pay up.

However industry representatives said Monday night's deal would help persuade German firms to make up the shortfall.

"There will be no doubt about German industry keeping its promise to pay five billion marks if the conditions are fulfilled," Gibowski said.

With available tax breaks, the government will end up footing about three-quarters of the final bill, rather than the 50-50 split between 2,553 firms and the state that was agreed.

U.S., German Negotiators Approve Slave Labor Deal

June 12

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - U.S. and German negotiators cleared the way Monday for the creation of a $4.86 billion German fund to compensate former slave and forced laborers from the Nazi era, a U.S. official said.

Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat said he and the chief German negotiator, Otto Lambsdorff, had reached an agreement on "legal peace" -- the technical term for arrangements to protect German companies from litigation in U.S. courts by former slaves.

Lambsdorff and a negotiator for German industry, Manfred Gentz, will recommend that the German government and German companies approve the agreement, Eizenstat told a news conference.

The German parliament must also pass legislation setting up the fund because half of the 10 billion marks will come from public money.

"We are on the verge of a historic agreement," Eizenstat said, expressing optimism that the accord would be approved by German government and industry.


Museum Allowed To Keep Sculpture

June 13, 2000

CHICAGO (AP) - The Art Institute of Chicago has reached an agreement allowing it to keep a sculpture that was sold at auction during the Nazi occupation of France in World War II.

The museum announced Monday that it will make a payment to the heirs of Federico Gentili di Giuseppe for the sculpture "Bust of a Youth," by Italian Francesco Mochi. In turn, the family will donate the artwork to the institute.

The museum did not disclose how much it will pay the family or the sculpture's value.
Gentili di Giuseppe, a Jewish resident of France and a representative of the Italian Ministry of Finance, owned
the marble sculpture before its 1941 public auction in Paris. He died of natural causes in 1940, and a French
court ordered the auction of 155 pieces from his art collection to pay outstanding debts after his heirs fled the
country.

The institute has publicly displayed the sculpture, thought to depict John the Baptist and believed to have been
created in 1630, since acquiring it in 1989 from Anthony Roth Fine Arts in London, the museum said in a
statement. Roth had acquired the bust through a public auction in Paris in 1988.

Gentili di Giuseppe's heirs, who have tried to regain the auctioned artwork since the 1950s, determined both
Roth and the institute acquired the sculpture in good faith, museum officials said.

The institute has identified almost 550 paintings and sculptures in its collection with incomplete ownership
histories during World War II - when thousands of artworks were stolen from Jews by the Nazis - and has been
working to find the rightful owners.


Dutch banks offer $132 mln for Holocaust claims

By Joan Gralla
06/13/00

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Dutch banks and the Amsterdam stock exchange are willing to pay more than $132
million -- over five times the amount they initially offered -- to settle claims they helped the Nazis steal bank
accounts and stocks from Jews, a source close to the issues said Tuesday.

If an accord is reached, this could clear the way for ING (ING.AS), Europe's fifth-largest financial institution, to
buy a Minnesota-based insurer called ReliaStar Financial Corp. (RLR.N) and the international and financial
assets of Connecticut-based Aetna (AET.N), the No. 1 U.S. health insurer. State officials have said they would
take Holocaust claims into account in considering buyouts of U.S. firms by Dutch companies.

The source, who declined to be named, said, "They are close to a settlement." Later, he added, "They now are
offering in excess of 300 million guilders; previously they had only offered 58 million guilders (nearly $25
million)."

A spokesman for Alan Hevesi, the New York City comptroller who leads a group of 900 public finance officers
that has considered giving Dutch banks and the Amsterdam bourse a 30-day deadline, was not available to
comment.

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, which consults with Dutch Jewish groups on
how Holocaust claims should be handled, declined comment on any details of a proposed accord, but said, "The
city comptroller has done it again. His active intervention has hopefully brought us now much nearer to a
settlement."

Hevesi in 1998 helped push Swiss banks into reaching a historic settlement of nearly $1.3 billion to resolve
charges they blocked Holocaust survivors from withdrawing prewar deposits by demanding impossible proofs,
such as death certificates from concentration camps.

Steinberg explained the proposed settlement with Dutch banks and the Amsterdam bourse -- which saw the
WJC threaten a proposed link with the New York Stock Exchange -- includes an apology by the Dutch banks
for helping the Nazis loot Jews, and a promise to undertake a new investigation of the role they played in the
Financial heavyweight ING had faced a double-barreled threat from the WJC because ING operates as both a bank and an insurer.

But in May concerns that its insurance area might still owe Holocaust survivors and heirs for prewar policies were eased when Dutch insurers, as a group, joined a panel investigating charges that Europe's insurers failed to honor such policies. Fellow Dutch institutions Aegon (AEGN.AS) and Fortis (FOR.AS) (FOR.B) also became members of the International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance Claims.

Asked whether the WJC would stop threatening to block ING's potential acquisitions in the United States if a bank accord were reached, Steinberg replied, "I choose to be hopeful. If in fact a settlement is achieved, we will be able to withdraw our opposition to Dutch corporate acquisitions in this country."


**ING sees regulators okaying Aetna buy**

AMSTERDAM, June 13 (Reuters) - Financial services group ING, under fire from the World Jewish Congress over Holocaust settlements, said on Tuesday it expected regulators to allow it to buy units of top U.S. health insurer Aetna.

The Jewish advocacy group is demanding ING reveal how it handled Jewish assets stolen by the Nazis, and has said it will consider lobbying state regulators -- who must approve the planned Aetna purchase -- to urge them to block the deal.

"ING is touring the entire United States to explain the Dutch situation to U.S. regulators," an ING spokeswoman said.

"We have a good feeling (that the takeover will happen as planned)...we met the requirement by joining the Eagleburger committee," she said, referring to a panel of insurance regulators and European insurers chaired by former U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger.

Connecticut-based Aetna said at the end of May that it was in talks to sell its international and financial units to ING, Europe's fifth largest financial institution.

The Financial Times' Internet edition reported on Monday that ING would meet Connecticut regulators to discuss the status of negotiations between Dutch banks and the Jewish community over investments seized during the Holocaust.

The ING spokeswoman could not immediately say whether the meeting would take place on Tuesday and referred further enquiries to ING's offices in the United States.

ING, which is also buying U.S. insurer ReliaStar Financial Corp, joined the international Holocaust restitution panel along with fellow Dutch financial institutions Aegon and Fortis in May.

Joining the Eagleburger-chaired International Commission on Holocaust-Era Insurance Claims was the WJC's key demand. But the Jewish advocacy group is still demanding ING reveals how it handled Jewish assets stolen by the Nazis.

The WJC said on June 5 that Dutch banks had made too little progress in settling the restitution claims and gave them a 30-day deadline.


Central Europe Online Daily News

**Slovak Victims of Nazism Seeking Same Compensation as Others**

BRATISLAVA, Jun 13, 2000 -- (CTK - Czech News Agency) The Slovak coordination committee still insists that Slovaks should be placed on an equal footing with Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, Russians, Belarusians and Czechs in the planned German compensation to slave labor survivors, the committee's chairman Fero Alexander
told CTK.

Their claims are mentioned in the planned German law on the Fund "Memory, Responsibility, Future."

"So far we have not reached the state in which Slovakia would join the compensation talks with the remaining five organizations and the Jewish Claims Conference (JCC). But both German law-makers and the next foundation for compensation know about the Slovak coordination committee as the only umbrella organization of the survivors," Alexander said.

About 6,000 people are claiming compensation. The sum may amount to about 72 million marks, Alexander said. However, since Slovaks were not directly represented in the talks between Germany and the victims, they ended up in the category of other countries in which the number of victims has not yet been enumerated, he added.

"Despite promises by both Germany and the USA that all those eligible will have an equal treatment, there is a strong fear here because the amount for the rest of the world' is thinning. From the original 1.1 billion marks it has been cut to 800 million and now only 540 million are being talked about," Alexander said.

Alexander, who also heads the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities in Slovakia, said it was advantageous for Slovak claims that there was a "clear support from the government," an agreement of all three organizations of victims as well as experience from previous events such as the Hirsch Initiative, the Bundestag humanitarian aid of 1,000 marks for the victims of Nazism which have not yet been compensated.

As in the case of German compensation Slovaks were "omitted" in the talks about Austrian compensation.

However, the Coordination committee is "quiet satisfied" with the promise by Austrian government commissioner Marie Schaumayer that despite their absence from the talks and bilateral agreements "victims from Slovakia will have an equal treatment as the rest."

This statement was upheld by Austrian Foreign Minister Benita Ferrero-Waldner along with a refusal of Slovak participation in the talks. "Unlike Germans, Austrians did not provide any quotas for individual countries. They will just give the applicant a sum similar to that paid by Germany.

However, Austria only regards as eligible those who were on forced labor in Austria, not in German concentration camps in Austria. Due to the definition, inmates from Mauthausen and 48 similar camps will be eligible for compensation from the German foundation, Alexander said.

A group of about 6,000 Slovak victims with a claim to German compensation will be reduced by about 800 Jewish Holocaust survivors who are to be compensated from the sum destined for the JCC, according to the latest information, Alexander said. On the other hand, another 600 Slovak Jews who survived the Holocaust, but were never sent to concentration camps as they managed to hide, will not get the compensation, Alexander said.

"Unfortunately, on formal grounds they are not likely to be eligible," he added. Slovak Nazi victims had to wait until last year for a law on compensation from domestic resources, not from Germany. Germany has refused to discuss the claims, referring to the existence of the war-time Slovakia which had its own racist legislation, although the present-day Slovakia is a successor to Czechoslovakia.

"I don't think we are to blame. As early as 1994 I discussed the issue with former German foreign minister Klaus Kinkel. We argued that perhaps along with Albania Slovakia is the only European nation with which no such agreement had been concluded. But we were simply unable to force Germany to resolve the question," Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan told journalists.

According to preliminary talks, concentration camps inmates are to obtain a maximum of 15,000 marks, and forced labor survivors 5,000 marks. (c) 2000 CTK - Czech News Agency)
US regulators and ING meet on Holocaust

By Adrian Michaels
in New York

ING, the Dutch financial services group, will meet Connecticut regulators today to discuss the status of negotiations between Dutch banks and the Jewish community over investments seized during the Holocaust.

The Dutch group has just started a US expansion, but its ambitions have been complicated by US pressure on Dutch banks and the Amsterdam stock exchange.

US regulators have the power to prevent companies from trading in the states in which they operate. ING - which is finalising an agreed $6bn takeover of ReliaStar, a Minneapolis-based life insurer, and is also in talks to acquire part of Aetna, the Connecticut-based health insurer - could have those acquisitions blocked without an agreement in the Netherlands over the issue.

The Dutch Jewish community, frustrated after two years of negotiations without final settlement, has asked for assistance from the same US monitoring committee that influenced previous talks with Swiss banks and Deutsche Bank.

People close to discussions between ING and the US states, which act collectively on the monitoring committee and separately in their own jurisdictions, say Connecticut regulators have implied in the past that they want to see a settlement before approving the Dutch group's acquisitions.

ING says only that it is hoping for a resolution soon. People within ING are keen not to appear presumptuous; the group is relatively unknown in the US and does not want a public relations debacle as it starts to purchase well-known names in US financial services.

ING has already struck some Holocaust-era deals related to insurance policies and bank deposits, although the bank settlement has been delayed by a dispute with the Amsterdam stock exchange. Today's meeting is its first in Connecticut related to the issue of missing shares.

About 90 per cent of the share investments by the Jewish community that were seized were returned at the end of the war, says ING. Historic estimates of the value of the missing 10 per cent have been agreed, but the sides are arguing over what adjustment should be made for inflation and what additional penalty should be attached.

The total could come to $250m, of which ING's share would be about one-quarter. ING's payments for insurance, bank and share claims could amount to $150m. On Thursday, Dutch banks, the stock exchange and the Dutch Jewish community are to meet again to try to resolve the final payment.
US and Germany agree on terms for 'legal peace' on slave labor claims

Forced Labor Payments: Too Late?

U.S., Germany clear impasse on compensation for Nazi-era slaves


Jerusalem Post

US and Germany agree on terms for 'legal peace' on slave labor claims
By Marilyn Henry

NEW YORK (June 14) - The US and Germany on Monday agreed to the terms for "legal peace" for German companies that will allow the DM 10 billion German slave labor initiative to move forward, 17 months after it was first proposed. The next step is for the German Bundestag to establish the framework for the fund, and for Nazi victims’ lawyers to ask US courts to dismiss dozens of class-action suits seeking compensation.

If the Bundestag can authorize the German foundation before its session ends in four weeks, payments to slave and forced laborers could begin by the end of the year.

"Our goal is for the German foundation to be the exclusive remedy and forum for the resolution of all claims against German companies arising out of World War II," Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat said after marathon talks in Washington. "This exclusive role for the foundation serves the foreign policy interests of the US. The alternative to this mechanism would be years of litigation that lasts beyond the life spans of the large minority of survivors."

The US has pledged to offer a "statement of interest" in future court cases seeking Nazi-era compensation from German companies. German industry, which is sharing the costs of the initiative with the German government, had wanted an ironclad guarantee from the US against future suits.

It was not able to get such certainty, in part because of the independence of the US judiciary. However, the federal courts thus far have sided with German industry - and in effect with the US government. Last September, two courts in New Jersey dismissed the first slave labor compensation cases, arguing that reparations is a matter for governments, not the courts.

And there was what one official called a serendipitous ruling at week’s end, when US District Court Judge William Shubb in Sacramento temporarily barred California officials from enforcing a state law requiring European insurers to submit lists of unpaid Holocaust-era claims.

The state law was challenged by German insurance companies.

The law was laudable, Shubb ruled, but he accepted the European insurers’ position, backed by the US government, that an alternative - akin to the German foundation - was the best forum to resolve war-era claims. That was through the International Commission on Holocaust Era Claims, which is headed by former secretary of state Lawrence Eagleburger, and which will be receiving funds from the German initiative.
Further, Shubb said the state law "certainly has the potential to affect [US] foreign affairs, and it is embarrassing to the United States to have individual states enacting legislation inconsistent with [US] promises and negotiations."

The German fund will include payments for slave and forced labor, confiscated property and war-era insurance policies that were not honored.

The final agreement would require the approval of the German government and industry, and survivors' lawyers, the Claims Conference, and five Central and Eastern Europe states.

The slave labor fund has become such an issue in German-American relations that even the White House weighed in after Monday's talks. President Bill Clinton issued a statement saying that a "major hurdle to agreement on the historic German initiative dealing with wrongs arising from World War II has now been overcome."

"German-American relations are based on our common commitment to human dignity coming from a shared history of democracy for over 50 years. This unique German initiative, reaching out to victims of the 20th century's most horrible tragedy, will convey dramatically to the entire world Germany's commitment to justice and human rights," Clinton said.

Forced Labor Payments: Too Late?

JEFF DONN, Associated Press Writer

06/14/00

WESTFIELD, Mass. (AP) - Stalin stole her parents, who died in Siberian work camps. The Nazis took away her homeland and her adolescence was spent in forced labor.

Finally, someone wants to give something back to Mary Phillips. Austria has agreed to pay settlements to an estimated 150,000 people forced to work there during the Nazi occupation.

The strange thing - maybe the closest thing to revenge - is this: Still full of rage at age 70 but at ease financially in her adopted U.S. homeland, Phillips does not need or want the money.

"Can you imagine how many pounds of clothing I can give to the poor if I can get that money? I'm going to give away every cent of it," she says. "I don't need their dirty money."

As parents remind children, life isn't always fair. Sometimes, though, it weighs on someone with an unaccountable burden. Since age 5, Phillips has been without parents to remind her of anything.

They were roused from their homes in the Ukraine and sent to Siberia in 1934, when Soviet ruler Joseph Stalin was seizing property, sending owners into slave labor and turning their land into collectives. Phillips' father, a blacksmith and land owner, refused to join a collective. He tried to hide in a big oven, but he was rounded up with Phillips' mother, two grandparents and seven aunts. Only two aunts survived.

With their closest family gone, Phillips and her younger sister were sent to an orphanage on a collective farm near their hometown of Berezan, about 70 miles south of Kiev. Phillips still remembers the daily hunger, dulled by meager meals of soup.

"I always had so much hate. We were so hungry," she says. "My wish was to stay alive."

Seven years later, even that semblance of a childhood collapsed. As Hitler's troops swept across the Ukraine, the orphanage fell apart. The two sisters found temporary shelter with a kindhearted local woman.
But the Nazis were desperate for workers to advance the war effort in the factories and fields of occupied Austria. Orphans went first. At age 12, Phillips begged a local couple to take in her younger sister, but they could house just one. Phillips, who was brought up and remains Russian Orthodox, left on a railroad with other unlucky Ukrainians, bound for Austria under Nazi guard.

"It's not only the Jews that suffered. Gentiles suffered too," she says.

She was taken first to a transit camp in Poland, where her head was shaved for lice. She was then shipped to an Austrian paper mill. She still remembers the sardonic smile of a plant manager when she begged in newly learned German for potatoes. One day, his grin was too much for her and she sprayed him with a water hose. She was whipped and sent away to an Austrian work farm.

For more than two years, until the liberation by American soldiers, she farmed grain and vegetables with several other unpaid workers from France and Poland, more than 12 hours a day, seven days a week. "We worked so hard. We were like slaves," she says.

The diet was mainly potatoes and cabbage. She was sometimes hit. She remembers one whipping there, too.

She expects to be angry always, not just at the Austrians and Germans, but the Russians too. "I never had any schooling. I don't remember my parents, my grandparents hugging me. I never had a doll. My whole life was destroyed. It's not only me. It's everybody," she says of the war's exploited, abused and killed.

Fifty-five years later, her tears flow fresh.

After the war, she worked in the kitchen of an American-run refugee camp, leading to her later career as a caterer. She eventually emigrated to Montreal, met a Polish-American from Westfield, married, moved to this western Massachusetts city, became a U.S. citizen and raised three children.

Now divorced, she spends her free time collecting clothing and food from dozens of friends and collaborators for several orphanages she has located in the Ukraine through a nephew there. Last year alone, she shipped about $5,000 worth. She also has raised money to build a Russian Orthodox church in her Ukrainian hometown.

"I think maybe she deals with her pain and hurt by trying to help other people," says her niece, Eva Filip, whose father reverted to the Polish version of the family name.

About 10 years ago, Phillips heard something about compensation to survivors of the Holocaust, which killed about 6 million Jews. A friend made inquiries in Austria and learned there was nothing for people like Phillips.

But the end of the Cold War and lawsuits by forced laborers started to focus attention on the question. Finally, in May, at an international conference, Austria agreed to compensate forced laborers in factories and farms and slave workers in concentration camps.

With approval expected from its parliament, Austria would give one-time payments $6,884 for concentration-camp labor, $2,295 for factory work, and $1,311 for farm work. The $393 million fund would be set up by the end of this year by the government and companies that used forced labor. The government has begun to gather information on who might be eligible for payments.

Martin Weiss, a spokesman for the Austrian Embassy in Washington, calls it "a moral gesture."

"Not everyone can be made whole after such a long time," he adds.

Phillips intends to apply for the settlement. She feels there is still time to make life better, if not whole, for her orphans. For herself, she has everything she wants, except memories to lull her to sleep.
WASHINGTON - U.S. and German negotiators reached agreement Monday night on lifting a key legal roadblock to compensating nearly 1 million survivors of slave labor during the Nazi era.

After 10 hours of talks in Washington, the teams reached a deal under which the Clinton administration would throw its full authority behind efforts to dismiss 55 lawsuits that are pending against German companies for their use of the labor.

The administration would take the position that the $5 billion compensation fund that German industry and the government have agreed to set up should settle all claims and that German companies should not be subject to endless lawsuits seeking more.

"I am very pleased that a major hurdle ... has been overcome," President Clinton said in a written statement Monday night.

The goal of Monday's talks was "enduring legal peace," Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat said in announcing the deal.

The German side had insisted on that protection in return for proceeding with creation of a foundation that, if schedules are kept, would allow survivors to begin receiving payments by the end of this year.

"The alternative to this mechanism would be years of litigation that lasts beyond the life spans of the large majority of survivors," Mr. Eizenstat said.

Many of the people live in the United States.

Since World War II, the German government has paid about $60 billion in reparations, pensions and other benefits to Holocaust survivors. But left out were survivors of forced- and slave-labor camps who were not able to file individual claims while living under communist rule in Eastern Europe.

The men and women worked in horrendous conditions to supply the Nazi war machine, often in factories of German companies that remain in business.

In November, after months of pressure and talk, German industry and government agreed to set up the $5 billion fund for the survivors. But key details remained to be resolved, prime among them the disposition of lawsuits pending against the companies.

Under the accord, the Clinton administration would formally state in court that it thinks it is in the foreign-policy interests of the United States to dismiss pending and future lawsuits. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright would agree, as would Mr. Eizenstat, the lead U.S. negotiator on compensation issues.

Because the judicial system is independent in the United States, White House officials cannot guarantee that it can end the lawsuits. Nonetheless, German government negotiator Otto Graf Lambsdorff said, "We have come as close as possible under the given circumstances."

Mr. Lambsdorff must now take the deal home for approval by his government.

Still pending in the debate over Nazi-era responsibility are claims that certain U.S. companies, such as Ford Motor Co., that had factories in Nazi Germany before the United States' 1941 declaration of war owe...
compensation to forced laborers. The companies have generally taken the position that they bear no responsibility because the injustices occurred after Nazis seized their plants.
Dutch Jews to settle Holocaust claims for $135 mln

Divers To Seek Jewish Treasure

Polish Jew, From Ireland, Helps Nazi Victims

Museum exposes France's dark collaborationist past


**Dutch Jews to settle Holocaust claims for $135 mln**

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, June 15 (Reuters) - Dutch Jewish leaders reached on Thursday an initial $135 million accord with Dutch banks and the Amsterdam bourse to settle claims they still owe Holocaust survivors for helping the Nazis loot their accounts, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) said.

The preliminary accord, which is more than five times the sum initially offered, should allow the WJC to drop objections to plans by Dutch companies to buy U.S. firms. The advocacy group had asked state regulators, who must approve such transactions, to delay pending deals until 55-year-old Holocaust claims were resolved.

State officials have warned ING, which wants to buy Minnesota-based ReliaStar and the financial and international units of the No. 1 U.S. health insurer Aetna, that Holocaust issues would be considered in evaluating their purchases.

ING, which operates as a bank and an insurance company, is Europe’s fifth largest financial institution.

In 1941, the Nazi agency in charge of collecting securities seized from Jews sold their shares on the Amsterdam bourse. The WJC had been considering fighting the stock exchange’s plans to link with the New York Stock Exchange unless it satisfactorily resolved Holocaust claims.

"The Dutch Jewish community has informed the WJC there is an in-principle agreement of 314 million guilders ($135 million) to settle claims against banks and the stock exchange for looted and unrestituted bank accounts and securities," Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director, told Reuters. The accord’s details still must be finalised.

**NEW YORK OFFICIAL PRAISED**

Steinberg saluted New York City Comptroller Alan Hevesi. Hevesi on Monday met with ING and Dutch government officials in an effort to jump-start the negotiations. Two years ago, Hevesi helped push Swiss banks into a groundbreaking settlement with Holocaust survivors who were blocked from withdrawing deposits.

"I credit the good offices of City Comptroller Alan Hevesi for bringing about what appears to be a just and historic resolution of this moral issue," Steinberg said.

A spokesman for Hevesi was not immediately available.

In May, a breakthrough in Holocaust restitution in the Netherlands was achieved when Dutch insurers, as a group, joined an international panel investigating whether Europe’s insurers robbed Holocaust victims by failing to make good on prewar policies.

The list of Dutch insurers who became members of the International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance Claims included ING, Belgo-Dutch financial group Fortis, and Aegon, the world’s seventh biggest insurer.
REPORT SEEKS RESTITUTION

ING, which has been eager to see the outstanding issues resolved, provided Reuters an English translation of a Dutch commission report on post-war restitution. The Netherlands has a poor wartime record: out of the 107,000 Dutch Jews whom the Nazis deported, only 5,200 survived.

The Dutch report, which said the Nazis seized some 50 million guilders in bank funds and 300 million guilders in securities from Dutch Jews, called on Dutch stockbrokers to make a symbolic payment in the millions of guilders.

The report added the 33 percent of the Dutch Jews who were middle- and upper-class were the most likely to survive. "Those who remained alive after the War, were those who could -- and did -- reclaim significant personal assets," the report said.

New York Times
June 16, 2000

Divers To Seek Jewish Treasure

ATHENS, Greece (AP) -- Divers plan to comb the seabed off southern Greece in search of a treasure of gold bars and jewels taken from Greek Jews during the Nazi occupation, a Jewish community leader said Friday.

The treasure -- which some estimates say could reach $2.4 billion -- was aboard a vessel that was believed scuttled under a plan devised by an SS officer to return after World War II to collect the loot.

But the officer, Max Merten, was arrested by Greek authorities in the late 1950s and apparently never managed to salvage the cache from the depths of Messinian Gulf, about 120 miles southwest of Athens.

No search was ever mounted for the loot in a nation full of lore concerning lost treasures dating back to the time of Alexander the Great.

Then a Greek man came forward last year claiming to have some connection to Merten and key information about the sunken ship. He approached the Central Board of Jewish Communities, said its president Moses Constantini, who added that the tipster has demanded his identity remain a secret.

"In the beginning, we considered the case to be complete fantasy," Constantini said.

But the man persisted and offered to handle the financing for the costly hunt.

Recovery of the treasure would resurrect another small part of a Jewish community that was nearly wiped out by the Nazis.

More that 90 percent of the 80,000-member Greek Jewish community was lost in Nazi concentration camps or killed before they left the country. There are about 5,000 Jews remaining in Greece.

Merten apparently tried to capitalize on the fears of those trying to save themselves. He demanded money and jewelry from Jews in the northern city of Thessaloniki, claiming the bribes would keep them from being sent to the death camps.

But the deportations went ahead and in 1943 Merten reportedly loaded a vessel with the fortune: gold sovereigns and bars, diamonds, precious stones.

Merten returned to Greece in 1958, but was arrested in Thessaloniki after a surviving Jew recognized him. He was tried and convicted as a war criminal in 1959, but was released shortly afterward following a government amnesty. Merten died in Germany.

The Central Board of Jewish Communities recently received permits needed to conduct an underwater search.
Under Greek law, underwater searches and even scuba diving without a permit are prohibited in most areas to avoid antiquities theft.

A team of divers from France is expected to arrive and begin the search later this month.

"We thought about it very long in order to become involved in this case. Because, as you understand, this case is a bit like a fairy tale," Constantini said.

"But in the end, we were persuaded by the evidence he gave us," he added. "We thought that we have nothing to lose by doing it, because if there is one chance in a hundred that this is true, we couldn't let this pass."

If any treasure is recovered, 50 percent will belong to the Greek state and the other half will be divided equally between the Central Board of Jewish Communities and the man who provided the information and financed the project, Constantini said.

But there is always the issue of survivors and their descendants possibly coming forward to claim part of the treasure.

"I don't think something like this could happen," countered Constantini.

New York Times
June 16, 2000

Polish Jew, From Ireland, Helps Nazi Victims

By JAN HOFFMAN

Oh, I'm going off in 52 directions again! Sorry!" Gideon Taylor apologizes charmingly, most exuberantly, his hands whipping through the air like a martial artist, his accent and outlook uniquely that of a Dublin man whose father was the Irish government's first Jewish minister.

The tale he's approaching, in his Manhattan office, took place about a decade ago, in Atsede Mariam, a dot at the end of a footpath in the Ethiopian wilderness. Mr. Taylor, then 26, was sitting in his tukul, the straw and mud hut where he readied thousands of Ethiopian Jews for an airlift to Israel, talking with Kes Taya, their 80-ish, near-blind rabbi.

"He asked me, 'Do you know about the Jews killed in Europe?'" recalls Mr. Taylor. "Just one question, then: Why did the Evil King Hitler do that?"

Caught by memory, Mr. Taylor slaps his knee in confounded silence. "And now," he continued, "I spend all my time thinking about the Holocaust, but I never get to think about it in such simple, basic terms."

After a decade with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, working on rescue missions for Jews in Ethiopia, Yemen and Syria and on relief programs in Africa and Eastern Europe, the tireless Mr. Taylor, 35, is executive vice president of the Claims Conference, the major umbrella group addressing compensation and restitution for Jewish Holocaust survivors.

In that role, he has a prominent seat in current negotiations.

Working with Israel Singer, the chief negotiator for the Claims Conference, Mr. Taylor, who has a law degree from Oxford, has been tough and detail-oriented, not only with the Germans, but also in talks with European insurers and the Austrians.

On Monday, the Clinton administration announced that a major obstacle to the creation of a $5 billion fund by the German government and industry for Nazi-era slave laborers and forced laborers -- Jews and non-Jews -- had been overcome. The deputy treasury secretary, Stuart E. Eizenstat, who represents the United States at the talks, said of Mr. Taylor, "We wouldn't be where we are today without him."

Last year, the Claims Conference, officially known as the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, distributed $239 million to survivors. "The job is fundamentally impossible," Mr. Taylor says. "You're taking the greatest
moral challenge, the Holocaust, and putting it together with the most base form of human interaction -- money. You can't really do compensation, you can't be made whole. So I speak of a measure of justice, something that's symbolic, that helps survivors live with a measure of dignity."

Mr. Taylor, two generations removed from the Holocaust, raised in a country neutral during World War II, might seem an unusual choice for the position, which he assumed about 18 months ago. But the Claims Conference needed someone like him.

ITS accomplishments were substantial: since the 1950's, when its leaders began negotiating without the international support, it has gotten Germany to set aside $50 billion. But some survivors criticized the Claims Conference for being bureaucratic and slow, its overworked staff impatient with elderly claimants.

Mr. Taylor was fresh, energetic, compassionate but also practical. He has replaced dusty file cabinets with Web sites and e-mail, speeded the claims process, and insisted on more and better-trained workers to answer the daily flow of 350 calls, 100 letters and 15 e-mail messages. Not bad for a guy who, until he came here as a Y.M.H.A. camp counselor when he was 18, formed his impressions of America from the Herman Wouk best seller "Marjorie Morningstar," "Peanuts" comics and books about the Johnson and Kennedy years.

"Politics in America seemed so glamorous," he says. "Those conventions! The balloons! It was the thing and the thing!" (This is how he talks when he's worked up: he never met an exclamation point he didn't embrace.) "Not like at home!"

As a boy he would campaign with his father, a veteran member of the Irish parliament, by rushing from church to church as Mass let out, passing out leaflets and shouting through a bullhorn precariously mounted on their car.

"The Irish have great respect for religion," he says. "An election worker said to my father, Sir, should we also come on Saturdays to your church?" (His Polish forebears went to Dublin, opened a storefront and selected an English name that derived from their vocation.)

It was also in his boyhood that he developed his ability to focus on small stuff -- buying bicycles for Rwandans when war destroyed transportation -- and to think big thoughts. His father's constituents always called the house about potholes, even as his father was working on social justice reform. "An Irish politician has to be both Senator D'Amato and Senator Moynihan," Mr. Taylor remarks.

Though he lives on the Upper West Side with his wife, Deborah Kazis, a writer, and their daughter, he remains fervently Irish, as only one who, as a toddler, had an eye-blink appearance in the film of "Ulysses," with Milo O'Shea, and whose mother, a children's author, is the librarian at a Jesuit seminary.

But he is acutely conscious of his other identity. "In the negotiations with the Germans, I try to make sure the details are done," Mr. Taylor says, "because even the smallest detail in a clause can have implications for thousands of people."

India Times
June 16, 2000

Museum exposes France's dark collaborationist past

By Bernard Edinger

France, which has long had trouble coming to terms with the darker pages of its World War Two history, will finally lay bare its collaborationist past in a new museum to be inaugurated this week.

The museum, to be opened on Sunday by President Jacques Chirac, pulls no punches: it shows that collaboration with the Nazis was a major phenomenon in wartime France and that French police were as dangerous for resistance fighters and Jews as the Gestapo.

It has taken 55 years and a new generation of historians for France finally to face the facts.

They are clearly presented in the museum which carries the name 'General de Gaulle, Second World War, Free France, Fighting France', which occupies a wing of Les Invalides army museum in central Paris.
On Wednesday, four days before its inauguration, the new museum was still teeming with workmen rushing to complete it on time.

Some clad in blue overalls oddly resembled wartime *maquis* (partisans) fighters as they lugged around Bren guns and ammunition belts while setting up exhibits.

One very large photo shows a crowd of grim men identified as French and foreign Jews being herded into buses between a double line of German soldiers and French policemen on their way to the Auschwitz gas chambers.

Such photos have often been published in history books but have never hung in Les Invalides, Paris’s fourth most popular museum with spectacular collections of armour and Napoleonic paraphernalia.

"I believe it has taken so long to set up this museum because the scars and wounds of the past were just too unhealed before," said Lieutenant-General Bernard Devaux, head of the Invalides complex.

"This time round however," says Vincent Giraudier, a young defence ministry historian, "there was no censorship whatsoever and I know because I helped set this up."

Speaking under a huge portrait of wartime free French leader General de Gaulle, Giraudier says he personally drafted many of the inscriptions which will accompany the exhibits.

"You will see that under the personal belongings of "Tom" Morel, commander of the Glieres Maquis, it says clearly that he was murdered by a French police officer," Giraudier says.

The Glieres Maquis was virtually wiped out after it challenged the collaborationist Vichy regime and the Germans in the Alps before the D-day allied landings in Normandy in June 1944. (*Reuters*)
Art

Firm offers free search for looted art

California Museums Lag in Search for Art Nazis Stole

Insurance & Banking

Dutch Holocaust families wait for insurance claims

British banks waive fees for Holocaust survivors

General

US Supreme Court ruling may affect Holocaust claims

Skeptical at first, Greek Jews agree to help search for Nazi loot

There can be no compensation for all of history

World War II Intelligence Documents to Open at National Archives


June 21 2000
Jerusalem Post

**Firm offers free search for looted art**

By Etgar Lefkovits JERUSALEM (June 21) - It was the summer of 1938, just before the doors of Austria were to be shut for the Jews. A prominent Jewish family from Vienna made it to safety in the US, with their lift containing the families' treasured artwork supposedly following right behind them. Yet when the container arrived in the US, it had already been opened and sorted through by the Gestapo. The 18th-century Venetian painting valued at $600,000 was gone. For more than 50 years, the family tried to trace the painting, writing scores of letters to different officials. Then, in July 1998, the family contacted the London-based Art Loss Register, and within a week the company discovered the painting in France. "This was our first claimant case from the US and it was really the most satisfying, both because the family had made such huge efforts over the years to find the painting and because it was our fastest success ever" said Sarah Jackson, the historic claims director of looted artwork from the Holocaust period at Art Loss Register. When Art Loss Register was established in 1990, it was to deal with stolen works of art, not looted art from the Holocaust. The company's chairman, Julian Radcliffe, coming with an impressive background in counter-terrorism, was asked by Sotheby's to deal with the problem. "At the time, finding stolen art used to be like rocket science" said Radcliffe. He and Jackson are here to publicize the free search service their company offers for looted art from the Holocaust period. With a computer database of over 100,000 works of art that have been stolen and looted over the past 50 years, Art Loss Register has the largest record of stolen works of arts, antiques, and valuables worldwide. Working in cooperation with the leading art auction houses of the world, as well as insurance agencies and art traders, works of arts and other valuables worth $75 million have been identified and in most cases reunited with their original owners. The idea to expand the company's searches to include work stolen from Jews during the Holocaust period came up in 1998 and seemed almost natural to Radcliffe. "Lots of unfortunate people should have their properties restored to them, but the question was could we get the art trade to help us finance
this project," he explained, "and indeed we are helped by both Sotheby's and Christie's in the financing of the research work we do." The search is fraught with hurdles though since the artwork has usually changed hands several times and the current owner may have bought without knowing that it was stolen. "We want potential claimants in Israel to know about and benefit from what is a unique search service" said Jackson. Israelis who have claims should forward them to the registrar at the Israel Museum, said Meir Meyer, the company's local representative.


California Museums Lag in Search for Art Nazis Stole

By Sharon Waxman
Washington Post Staff Writer
Wednesday, June 21, 2000; Page C01

LOS ANGELES -- As prominent U.S. museums scrutinize their collections for art that Nazis may have stolen from private families, many museums on the West Coast with significant numbers of works bought after World War II say they do not have the resources or the interest to undertake similar research.

But those West Coast museums that are undertaking such provenance research are finding vast numbers of paintings with gaps in ownership during World War II. The Getty Museum, just completing a first phase of inquiry, has found that more than half of its paintings collection has wartime gaps--248 of its 425 works. These include a masterpiece by 17th-century Dutch master Jan Steen and, an examination of the Getty's records shows, could include works by Pierre Auguste Renoir, Gerard Hoet and Paul Cezanne. While not all paintings with wartime gaps are necessarily stolen, the large proportion of such works at the Getty suggests that at least some may have come from families plundered during the Holocaust and may be the subject of claims by their heirs. Stolen art found in other museums is being returned or its claimants are being financially compensated. For example, the Seattle Art Museum last year returned a painting by Henri Matisse, "Odalisque," to the heirs of French collector Paul Rosenberg.

The search for plundered art has surged to the fore in Europe and, more recently, the United States, due to investigative journalism that has forced open long-dormant records in Western Europe.

Hitler's Third Reich systematically ransacked art from the homes of Jews and Nazi enemies throughout Europe, keeping some distinguished pieces and selling so-called "degenerate"--modern--art for the profits.

At the end of the war, the Allies attempted to return Nazi loot to the countries of their original owners, but little was returned to survivors, who were discouraged by the traditional secrecy of the international art trade, lack of access to government archives, destruction of private files and a sense of hopelessness on the part of family members. Some stolen art ended up in European state museums or was resold through legitimate art dealers who paid little attention to the question of wartime provenance.

A State Department conference in 1998 drew attention to the issue, and American museums were urged by their own association--the American Association of Art Museum Directors--to inspect their collections to help survivors with the difficult task of locating stolen art.

But unlike their East Coast counterparts, several West Coast institutions with major collections of European paintings, drawings and decorative arts, such as the Norton Simon collection in Pasadena and UCLA Hammer Museum in Westwood, say they are at least a year away from completing basic research into their own collections, much less a decision about making their findings public. Provenance research can be a painstaking business that involves mountains of old documents ranging from auction catalogues to faded newspaper clippings.

"I'm sure there's a lot here," acknowledges Sara Campbell, chief curator at the Norton Simon, a premier
collection of 19th- and 20th-century European art with 1,000 paintings. "This is something we don't know enough about."

Campbell says she has put the provenance research "on a back burner" because of tight resources at the museum, although one researcher is reviewing the period between 1933 and 1945 full time, she says.

"It's a high priority, but we don't have the resources in place," says Terry Morello, a spokeswoman for the Hammer Museum, named for Armand Hammer, who built Occidental Petroleum. Hammer made a fortune wheeling and dealing all over Europe and behind the Iron Curtain, and "behaved like a country unto himself," she notes. "We fully expect to find things with gaps in them."

The San Diego Museum of Art, which has 300 European paintings and thousands of sculptures and prints, has decided not to undertake research over wartime gaps at all, choosing to wait and see if any claims of ownership are made.

"Dedicating the resources necessary to do this is not a priority of the institution at this time," says Steven Kern, San Diego's curator of European art. "I would hope nobody would think we're dragging our feet, but provenance is a funny issue. When is enough enough? How far do you go? When are claims legitimate or not?" He adds: "What is the art equivalent of an ambulance chaser?"

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, calls this comment "particularly egregious." He points out that the American Association of Art Museum Directors--to which San Diego and most other U.S. museums belong--has pledged to actively look for works of dubious provenance.

Provenance problems have notably failed to ignite enthusiasm in the American West, where the issues sometimes seem distant, occurring a half-century and a continent away.

Ironically, though, the provenance issue is particularly relevant in this part of the country, because many major art collections are so new. Many were founded in the early and middle parts of the 20th century by cash-rich entrepreneurs who sought to establish cultural credentials by buying art from Europe's cash-poor upper class.

Norton Simon, who made his fortune from Hunt Foods, began buying art in the 1950s. Hammer created his collection from the 1920s onward. California entrepreneurs who ultimately donated paintings to California museums, such as the Ahmansons and Gard de Sylvas in Los Angeles, the Putnams in San Diego or the Huntingtons and Oakeses in San Francisco, were all buying art in the years currently under scrutiny.

"Clearly that was a period of movement, especially on the West Coast," notes Kern, San Diego's curator. "That period of World War II was a period of growth in our collection, in all areas."

J. Paul Getty, the eccentric and miserly oil baron, was a particularly eager bargain-hunter in the 1930s. In 1938 and '39, Getty traveled extensively around Europe, keeping a daily diary of his activities and sometimes noting when he nabbed a good deal in the art market.

On Oct. 24, 1938, Getty notes that he visited the Vienna palace of Baron Louis de Rothschild, held under arrest by the Nazis since their invasion of Austria in March, and "made inquiry about the furniture," according to a biography by Robert Lenzner. The palace had been looted of its 18th-century French furniture, paintings and tapestries, and Getty went to Berlin a few days later, where he knew several high-ranking Nazis, to continue his inquiries about the furniture.

"The Rothschild furniture may be sold in January [1939]," he notes in his diary, according to the Lenzner book.

In the end, Getty bought two French desks from this collection, though not until 1950 in New York, after it had been restored to the Rothschilds, according to the Getty's records. But many other pieces in the museum's top-ranking decorative arts collection raise provenance questions, such as an 18th-century oak and pine table with gilt veneer. The Getty's own catalogue notes that it was "confiscated by the Third Reich, 1940-1945," but doesn't
say from whom, or if it was returned.

"Clearly that's one we don't have an answer for," says chief curator Deborah Gribbon, in a wide-ranging interview on the subject. "We don't have firm evidence yet."

Gribbon stresses that a gap in a painting's provenance does not mean that it comes from a looted collection. "I don't regard the gaps as open to challenge or a source of concern," she says.

But the museum is continuing its research into about a dozen paintings that apparently are causes for concern, including a magnificent Steen, "The Satyr and the Peasant Family." Getty records indicate that the painting may have been plundered from Belgium between 1939 and 1945, but officials say that information comes from a notation on a photo of the painting found in London's Witt Library. A list of 248 paintings with provenance gaps will be posted on the Getty's Web site by the end of June.

Meanwhile the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with 700 European paintings, is about two-thirds of the way through its provenance research. Spokesman Keith McKeown declined to say how many paintings had been discovered to have gaps in their wartime history--describing it as "a handful." He said the museum would put its list on the Internet "during the summer" before starting on the museum's other collections--sculpture, drawings and decorative arts.

But McKeown said research at younger museums like LACMA, created in 1965, is particularly difficult. "This is a relatively new institution. Our works are not as studied and published as institutions in the East," he explains. "We're still basically dealing with written records. A number of other museums have already computerized their records."

The de Young Museum in San Francisco is about halfway through provenance research into its 900 European paintings, but a spokesman said it does not have the resources to complete the project swiftly.

But World Jewish Congress Director Steinberg says that basic research--finding out if a painting has a provenance gap or not--is simple enough. He said he would be more convinced by the argument that museums lack resources if curators showed a willingness to complete even this phase of research.

"If there is a good-faith undertaking by museums to do this research and financial aid is necessary, it would be wonderful for the federal government to help them," he says. "But the fact of the matter is, even when the easy part is asked of museums they don't do it."


Dutch Holocaust families wait for insurance claims

06/20/00

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, June 20 (Reuters) - Keeping up its campaign to reclaim insurance policies for Holocaust survivors, the World Jewish Congress (WJC) on Tuesday denounced a Dutch body for failing to answer recent claims on pre-Holocaust insurance policies.

Since November, 135 Dutch Holocaust survivors living in Israel have sent 416 claims to the Dutch body handling charges insurers failed to pay pre-World War Two policies, but they have received no answer, WJC Executive Director Elan Steinberg told Reuters.

The international Jewish advocacy group plans to turn the claims over to the International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance claims when it convenes on Wednesday in London, he said.

The commission will in turn pass the claims to the individual Dutch insurers who owned the prewar life or property policies,
The commission wants to settle claims quickly because most Holocaust survivors by now are quite elderly. Steinberg said that so far this year some 46 Dutch Holocaust survivors who live in Israel had died.

Dutch insurers joined the commission in late May.

Led by former U.S. Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger, the panel is probing whether Europe’s insurers failed to honour the prewar policies of Holocaust survivors. The WJC, along with Israel and five U.S. state regulators, serve on the panel.

Steinberg said that only 135 people accounted for 416 claims because individuals often had more than one kind of insurance policy and because these Holocaust survivors might be sending in claims for different family members.

"We have every confidence in the good faith of Dutch insurers to rapidly settle these claims," he added.

The powerful WJC has taken such steps as asking U.S. state regulators to delay approving acquisitions of U.S. firms by the Dutch companies until Holocaust issues are resolved.

Two Dutch insurance giants, Aegon, the world’s seventh biggest insurer, and ING, Europe’s fifth largest financial institution, both have said they know of no outstanding Holocaust claims against them. Fortis, a Belgian-Dutch financial group, also fell under Eagleburger’s oversight when the Dutch association of insurers joined the panel.

The Netherlands is famous for hiding Jewish teenager Anne Frank from her Nazi persecutors during World War Two, but also sharply criticised for failing to return Jewish property after the war. The Netherlands was occupied by the Germans between 1940 and 1945.

**British banks waive fees for Holocaust survivors**

*06/20/00*

LONDON, June 20 (Reuters) - British banks have agreed to waive their charges for Holocaust survivors who are living in Britain and receiving compensation payments from Germany, the government said on Tuesday.

"I am pleased that all the major banks have agreed to waive their charges relating to Holocaust payments in future," Trade and Industry Secretary Stephen Byers said in a statement.

Jewish groups said the number of people likely to benefit from the announcement was in the low thousands.

They are survivors of the Nazi policy of extermination of the Jews who are now receiving compensatory pensions from the German government. But they had faced monthly bank charges for the cost of transferring and converting the payments to pounds.

The Financial Times said that these fees had ranged from two to 12 pounds ($3.02 to $18.10) per transaction, on payments of about 250 pounds a month.

Byers said his department was seeking the help of German authorities to identify those who would benefit from the arrangement.

"But in the meantime potential beneficiaries should make themselves known to one of the following banks," Byers said.

They were: Bank of Scotland; Barclays; HSBC; Lloyds TSB; and Royal Bank of Scotland/National Westminster. ($1=.6628 Pound)


June 20 2000

Jerusalem Post

**US Supreme Court ruling may affect Holocaust claims**

By Marilyn Henry NEW YORK (June 20) - In a decision that could thwart the financial and political leverage...
used for Holocaust claims, the US Supreme Court yesterday ruled that the making of foreign policy is the prerogative of the federal government, not the states. The court threw out a Massachusetts trade law that had the effect of punishing Myanmar, also known as Burma, for human rights abuses. The state had limited purchases from companies doing business with Myanmar, arguing that it had a right to apply a "moral standard" to its spending decisions. The court, though, said such sanctions, however noble the intent, are not permitted when they interfere with American foreign policy. The US government and individual states have wielded trade sanctions for political purposes in the past, notably against South Africa to protest its apartheid regime. In that case, however, there was no divergence between the federal government and the states over policy. That was not the case with the so-called "Burma law," or with the Holocaust and assorted other issues. The Massachusetts law was challenged by the National Foreign Trade Council, with the backing of the Clinton administration. They argued that foreign policy must be controlled exclusively by the federal government. They also said that inconsistent state foreign-trade policies harms American economic trade interests, and that the law amounted to a "coercive secondary boycott." The court agreed, saying that the state law "undermines the president's capacity for effective diplomacy." "The president's maximum power to persuade rests on his capacity to bargain for the benefits of access to the entire national economy, without exception for enclaves fenced off willy-nilly by inconsistent political tactics," it said in a unanimous ruling. The ruling is expected to moot more than 20 similar anti-Burma measures and local legislation that would impose sanctions against Nigeria, Tibet, and Indonesia. It is also expected to tie the hands of state and local public finance officers who have been encouraged by Jewish organizations to use or threaten to use sanctions against Swiss, German, Dutch, and Austrian entities and enterprises over Holocaust-era claims. Technically, states could argue that the US cannot interfere with local officials' "fiduciary responsibilities." However, said one expert in New York, "that argument only works if they can keep their mouths shut about their motives, and so far they haven't kept their mouths shut." Local sanctions in Holocaust cases have set cities and states against the federal government. Deputy Treasury Secretary Stuart Eizenstat has argue for the last three years against sanctions, both in general terms and specifically against actions by cities and states. In a forceful exchange with the Senate Banking Committee over Holocaust assets in Swiss banks two years ago, Eizenstat lashed out: "I get paid to make judgments about how our actions affect foreign countries. I can assure you that far from helping Holocaust survivors achieve a just and fair settlement, sanctions will delay and retard the process, making it more difficult for us to get a measure of justice for Holocaust survivors." Sanctions, he said, "are wrong in principle, because they are unwarranted and because our nation should speak with one voice in matters of foreign policy and international commerce."

Skeptical at first, Greek Jews agree to help search for Nazi loot
By Jean Cohen

ATHENS, June 21 (JTA) - A man with a story dating back to the war years is prompting a search for buried treasure allegedly looted from Greek Jews by the Nazis.

The man, who wishes to remain anonymous, visited the offices of the Salonica Jewish community in 1999, and told them that he knew of an area off the Greek coast where an SS officer named Max Merten, one of the top Nazi officials in Greece during the war, had buried cash, jewelry, religious artifacts and other valuables before the mass deportation of Greek Jews in 1944.

The Jewish official, skeptical of the story, referred him to the leader of the Central Jewish Board of Greece, Moses Costantinis.

The man repeated the story to Costantinis, explaining that he knew Merten because the two were in jail together in 1958, when Merten was jailed after a Holocaust survivor identified him during one of his trips back to Greece to search for the treasure.

In March 1959, Merten was tried and sentenced to 25 years in prison, but then-Prime Minister Kostantinos Karamanlis freed him after eight months and sent him back to Germany.
At first, Costantinis didn't believe the man. Since the end of World War II, many rumors about hidden Jewish loot have surfaced in Greece, but nothing has ever been found.

But the man persevered, and Costantinis eventually relented.

"Although the story sounded very strange and implausible, I thought that if there was one in a million chance to be true and I said no, all that money that belongs to the Greek Jewish community would never reach its rightful owners. I would have committed a moral crime," Costantinis said.

The man asked Costantinis for $1.6 million to finance the operation, but the Jewish leader refused. In February, an agreement was reached: The man would finance the salvage operation and get exclusive film rights.

In accordance with Greek law, the government would receive 50 percent of the treasure, which some have estimated could be worth $2.4 billion. The Greek Jewish community and the man would each get 25 percent.

The operation is likely to begin in mid-July.

There can be no compensation for all of history
Eliahu Salpeter
Ha'aretz
June 21, 2000

The soon-to-be-concluded agreement on restitution payments to forced laborers in German industrial plants during the Second World War is but one more step toward a measure of justice for a quarter of a million concentration camp prisoners and a million "free" forced laborers who were recruited for industrial and agricultural jobs from the countries occupied by the Nazis. However, the broadening of the compensation rights of those who suffered under the Nazis and the increase in the number of those entitled to compensation raise a question as to the reasonable limits of the list of persons that can be considered eligible for restitution and as to the historic depth of the commitment to provide compensation. Are we witnessing the opening of a Pandora's Box of demands that can never be met and which will perhaps overshadow the demands of Holocaust victims?

These are not theoretical questions. Are restitution payments to Jews justifiable while restitution and compensation payments are being denied to the gypsies who were with those Jews in Nazi concentration camps? Why should restitution payments be demanded only of the Germans and not their allies? What about the victims of other wars? Where and when should we draw the line as far as any statute of limitations is concerned?

The list of potential recipients of restitution payments for various injustices during various eras is almost endless. There is an ongoing debate on compensation for native Americans who were banished from their lands and were exterminated by white settlers in both North and South America. The rights of native Americans have already been officially recognized and African Americans are beginning to air their grievances. Next in line will be the Armenians, the Ethiopians, the aborigines of Australia and all the other nations that were exploited by the colonialist powers. Standing behind them in line are the Koreans and the rest of the nations whose countries were occupied by the Japanese in World War II. A little closer to home, how will the restitution issue affect the demands and rights of Palestinian refugees?

In presenting their demands for compensation, African Americans draw an explicit and close comparison with the Jews who suffered during the Holocaust. This comparison appears in every compensation argument made by African Americans, and this phenomenon became especially noticeable after the debate began on compensation payments to be made by German industrial plants to forced laborers.
Jews may find it bizarre if not illogical to hear African American leaders claiming that the fate of their people in the New World was far worse than what the Jews suffered at the hands of the Nazis. African American demands have recently been presented by Robinson Randall, in his "The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks," where he writes, for example: "Slavery was, and remains, an American holocaust. It lasted 20 times as long as the Nazi Holocaust. It killed at least 10 times as many people. It affected three continents ... it annihilated entire cultures: languages, religions, customs."

According to Robinson, America has continued to maintain silence about the issue of African American suffering "[even] as U.S. Under-Secretary of State Stuart Eisenstat labored to make 16 German companies compensate Jews used as slave laborers during the Nazi era."

Robinson also notes that "[daily], Americans queue in long lines to enter the Holocaust Museum, where the Nazi terror is remembered in wrenching detail ... yet nowhere on the mall [downtown Washington] can anything be found - monument, memorial or stone tablet - to commemorate the hundreds of millions of victims of the American holocaust."

The demands and claims made by Robinson are backed up by many black intellectuals and university professors in the United States. Even the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations refers in its information material to the support provided by the American government to Holocaust victims in their struggle to obtain compensation from Swiss banks and from German companies.

The sums of money mentioned in the compensation demands made by African Americans reach astronomical heights, ranging between 1.4 and 8 trillion dollars. A group of blacks who held a conference last year in Ghana demanded 77 trillion dollars plus interest for all the suffering and material damage that whites have inflicted on blacks. This sum exceeds the total assets possessed by all of the nations of the world. (There are, of course, more reasonable compensation ideas such as guaranteed university tuition fees for every needy black child or a $100,000 grant to every black family in America. However, these compensation payments would be accompanied by the cancellation of any privilege or benefit granted under the "affirmative action" policy that is so widespread in contemporary America.)

Arguments are being heard against any form of compensation to African Americans. These arguments are being put forward by (white) American commentators who invariably use the argument used against restitution payments for Jewish Holocaust victims, namely, that no sum of money would ever be enough to compensate the victims for their suffering. In the case of African Americans, these white opponents of compensation are saying that no amount of money can correct the injustices of 240 years of slavery.

A more practical line of reasoning used by this group is that there is a fundamental difference between the claims of African Americans and those of the Jews (and the gypsies). First of all, slavery was abolished 150 years ago and thus, now that three generations have passed since that time, no one can claim to be a victim of slavery. Second, the majority of white Americans (from whom the Afro-Americans are demanding compensation) are immigrants or the children of immigrants: The last freed black slave died many years before any of them arrived or was born in America.

There is another crucial difference between African American claims against America and Jewish and gypsy claims against Germany. Six million Jews and hundreds of thousands of Romanies and Sintis (that is, the members of the two gypsy nations of Europe) were deported to concentration camps and were murdered in gas chambers in the name of an insane racist ideology.

Many profound differences separate the Holocaust of the Jews and the gypsies from the suffering of other nations in the distant and not-so-distant past. Two of those differences are the deliberate manner of the physical extermination of the Jews and the gypsies and the "professionalism" exhibited by the exterminators.
The extension of the list of restitution claimants could blur the unique character of the Jewish Holocaust in Europe. Nonetheless, it is clear that, even regarding the Jews and the gypsies, a statute of limitations must be enforced for past suffering and there must also be some future cut-off date for the submission of compensation claims. The setting of a deadline for future claims is the focus of the current debate over compensation payments from German industry.

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**WWII Intelligence Documents to Open at Nat. Archives**

U.S. Newswire
19 Jun 14:36

**World War II Intelligence Documents to Open at National Archives**

To: National and Assignment desks
Contact: National Archives Public Affairs Office, 301-713-6000,
or Giuliana Bullard, 703-532-1477;
Web site: <http://www.nara/iwg>

News Advisory:

In a major release of declassified records, the Nazi War Criminal Records Interagency Working Group (IWG) will open at the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Md., approximately 400,000 pages of declassified Office of Secret Services (OSS) records. The OSS was the wartime forerunner to the Central Intelligence Agency. The opening is the result of the work of the CIA and the National Archives under the guidance of the IWG. The IWG was established to oversee government-wide declassification efforts in accordance with the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act of 1998, which mandates the declassification of records relating to World War II war criminals and war crimes.

The main body of records consists of documents that remained classified when the first OSS records were released to the public in the mid-1980s. They include a wide range of materials dealing with all facets of wartime intelligence operations. Sixty-one hundred (6,100) of the pages would have continued to be withheld had they not been found by CIA reviewers to be responsive to the Act. These records consist primarily of prisoner of war interrogation reports, refugee and emigre debriefings, documentation of OSS clandestine missions into France and Norway, and reports on a U.S. government program, known as Safehaven, to identify and block from flight German financial assets and other war spoils.

**WHEN:**
Monday, June 26, at 10:30 a.m.

**WHERE:**
National Archives at College Park, Md., 8601 Adelphi Rd., lecture rooms A and B.

**DETAILS:**
All researchers must have a current National Archives research card which can be obtained either at the downtown National Archives building (Pennsylvania Avenue and Seventh Street) or at the National Archives at College Park. Clean research room rules will apply.

For additional press information, call Giuliana Bullard at 703-532-1477 or National Archives Public Affairs at 301-713-6000. Visit the IWG Web site at the National Archives home page: <http://www.nara/iwg>. 

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Latvia May Indict Alleged Nazi

06/17/00

RIGA, Latvia (AP) -- Latvian prosecutors plan to charge suspected Nazi war criminal Konrads Kalejs with genocide, the Baltic News Service reported Saturday.

Now 86, Kalejs would be the first alleged Nazi to face such charges in this ex-Soviet republic since it won independence in 1991. Formal charges are expected by early July, BNS reported.

Kalejs now lives in Australia after being deported from the United States, Canada and Britain. Human rights groups claim he was an officer in the Arajs Kommando, a Nazi-sponsored death squad responsible for the murder of some 30,000 people, mostly Latvian Jews, during World War II.

Kalejs denies the charges.

Chief prosecutor Rudita Abolina said the government uncovered evidence that Kalejs was a chief guard at a Nazi-run concentration camp in Salispils, about 25 miles from the capital, Riga, BNS reported.

Some 80,000 Jews were murdered during the 1941-44 Nazi occupation of Latvia. Under international pressure to bring suspected Nazis to trial, Latvian prosecutors launched a criminal investigation of Kalejs earlier this year.

Latvia and Australia agreed in April on a new extradition treaty expected to go into force by the end of the year. BNS reported that Latvian prosecutors will request Kalejs’ extradition once he is charged.

Top UK court bars appeal by convicted war criminal

LONDON, June 19 (Reuters) - Britain's highest court announced on Monday that it had upheld the conviction of retired railway ticket collector Anthony Sawoniuk as a Nazi war criminal.

Three law lords -- Lords Slynn, Hope and Hobhouse -- refused Sawoniuk permission to appeal against the decision taken last February by the Appeal Court headed by the former Lord Chief Justice, Lord Bingham, to uphold Sawoniuk's conviction.

Sawoniuk was the first person to be found guilty in Britain of Nazi war crimes when he was convicted at London's Old Bailey criminal court of involvement in the massacre of Jews in German occupied Belarus in 1942.

In the decision now backed by the law lords, Lord Bingham said that despite the "unprecedented passage of time" -- 57 years -- since the killings, the court was satisfied that the trial was handled correctly.

Sawoniuk, 78, was convicted last April on two charges of murdering Jews at Domachevo, in what is now Belarus, in 1942 and was given two life sentences.

In his challenge to his conviction he claimed that the trial judge had "erred in law" in failing to stay the murder charges.

He said during his trial that he had never killed anyone, telling the jury: "I never did and I never dreamed of doing it. I am not a monster."

The trial was the first of its kind and took place after an inquiry by Britain's War Crimes Investigation Unit.

The law lords considered Sawoniuk's application for permission to appeal in private and gave no reasons for their decision.
Israeli remembers Auschwitz's last Jew

Danielle Haas

JERUSALEM, June 18 (Reuters) - When he died last month, Shimson Klueger was thought to be the last Jew of Auschwitz.

Closeted from prying eyes in his ramshackle hut, Klueger lived more than half a century as a recluse -- the sole surviving Jew in the Polish town of Oswiecim, notorious for its Nazi death camp in which 1.5 million people, mostly Jews, died.

People in the southern Polish town, known by both its German and its Polish names, recalled that Klueger had once been a member of the Orthodox Jewish Belzer Hassidic sect. Some left him food in a bowl he placed outside his weathered wooden door.

But few, if any, saw him for years.

A Jewish educator from Jerusalem, Michael Berl, who happened to be in Poland when Klueger died, said he had first learned of the man's existence while touring Auschwitz a decade ago.

"I asked our guide if there were any living Jews there, and he said yes there was -- Klueger, but that he bordered on being a hermit," Berl told Reuters in Jerusalem on Sunday.

When Berl tried to make contact with the man, he was met with a brusque Yiddish "Gay avek" (Go away).

"He still thought the war was raging. After 50 years alone, he had lost it," said Berl, who acknowledged he knew nothing of what the recluse endured in the war.

When Klueger died aged 72 in the local institution where he had lived for two years, there seemed little hope of giving him a Jewish burial.

There were no Jews to say the ritual blessings, no rabbi to prepare his body and mourn him. Attempts to reach Klueger's only known relative, his brother Moshe in Brooklyn, failed.

A young rabbi in nearby Cracow, who had been contacted by Klueger's institution, was unversed in the techniques of Jewish burial preparation, Berl said. By chance, Berl was leading a tour group of Jewish American youths a few hours' drive away.

Berl's mobile phone rang. It was the rabbi. He knew it was just a few hours before the start of the Jewish sabbath, when all work and driving is forbidden according to Orthodox law, but the rabbi wanted to know if the group could come and help.

THE FINAL JEWISH BURIAL

Before World War Two, Poland was home to a Jewish population of 3.3 million, 10 percent of the total population. The Nazi genocide wiped out 90 percent of the Jewish community that had previously been the largest in Europe.

A post-war pogrom and later bouts of anti-Semitism reduced the population to around 10,000.

During the four-and-a-half-hour drive to Oswiecim, one of Berl's group, who was a member of her local burial society, coached the rabbi by phone through the process of readying the body for burial in keeping with Jewish law.

The group arrived before sunset. Students from New York's Ramaz school in Manhattan wrapped Klueger's body in the ritual prayer shawl used as a burial shroud and carried out the ceremony in Oswiecim's small wooded Jewish cemetery.

Three local residents came, Berl recalled -- two old men and a journalist. "This was a pure historic moment when a door was closed on the Jews of Auschwitz once and for all," Berl said. "It was profoundly overwhelming for us all."


Polish Jews to get back nearly $2 bln in property
NEW YORK, June 19 (Reuters) - Under a pact reached last week, the roughly 10,000 Jews who still live in Poland stand to get back $1.5 billion to $2 billion in so-called communal property first taken by the Nazis and then seized by the Communists, according to the World Jewish Congress.

Thirty percent of the properties will go back to 19 Jewish communities where enough Jews still live to derive benefit from them, Elan Steinberg, WJC executive vice president, told Reuters by telephone on Monday.

The remaining seventy percent will go to a foundation to be run by the WJC and the Polish Jewish community.

Communal property is the term used for synagogues, religious schools, hospitals, community centres, cemeteries and the like. Before World War Two, these properties served Poland’s 3.5 million Jews. Many of the facilities were later converted to other uses. The value of the property that will be reclaimed was estimated by Kalman Sultanik, a WJC vice president and Polish Jewish Holocaust survivor.

Some of the properties, including a large yeshiva or Jewish religious school now being used as a medical school, will probably not be returned, Steinberg said. Compensation will likely be paid instead. "All these accommodations will be made in the spirit of good will and cooperation," he said.

Polish Jews have already recovered some of the community's old properties, including the site of their synagogue in Gdansk, but in many cases they face opposition from locals who feel the sites have become theirs by force of custom.

In some cases, properties might be sold if they are no longer needed. "Obviously, the properties servicing 3.5 million people cannot possibly be used by 10,000 Jews scattered throughout the country," Steinberg said.

The WJC-Polish Jewish foundation will decide how best to use the properties in 39 communities where few Jews now live. "If a community has two Jews there, it's not necessary to have a school there, but it might be necessary to provide social or medical services, so properties could be sold for those purposes," he added.

Most of the several hundred thousand Polish Jews who escaped death at the hands of Nazi German invaders were later driven out of Poland in waves of anti-Semitism, often stirred by Communist authorities.

Since Poland returned to democracy in 1989, it has been working hard to improve relations with the tiny domestic community of Jews, Israel and the Jewish Diaspora. ((U.S. Municipal Desk, 212-859-1650, nyc.munis.newsroom@reuters.com))


Group gives Austria insurers Holocaust deadline

June 16, 2000

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK (Reuters) - The World Jewish Congress Friday said it was considering unspecified political and economic measures against Austria’s insurers because they have not joined a panel probing whether Europe’s insurers robbed Holocaust survivors.

The group’s threats to fight Dutch insurers’ buyouts of U.S. firms in May helped push Dutch insurance companies into joining the International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance Claims. The World Jewish Congress (WJC) Friday said it was giving Austria’s insurers a June 21 deadline for joining the insurance panel. That is the date of the panel’s next meeting in London.

The European Union, Israel and the United States all have shunned Austria since its government in early February decided to include the far-right Freedom Party, whose former leader Joerg Haider is known for making remarks that seemed to minimize Nazi atrocities.
Austria has taken some steps to address 55-year-old claims by Holocaust survivors, appointing envoys to deal with forced laborers, who want compensation for their brutal toil, and for property restitution. And in early February, the government promised to encourage insurers to work with the insurance panel, which is led by Lawrence Eagleburger, a former U.S. secretary of state.

Although Austrian government officials, who represented the country's insurers, met last week with the insurance panel, Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director, told Reuters they did not promise that the country's firms would become members. The WJC, a Jewish advocacy group, is a member of the panel.

"Despite that meeting, there has been no commitment for the Austrian insurers to join their European counterparts as members of the international commission," Steinberg said.

"We will consider economic and political measures against the Austrian insurance companies if they do not join by the upcoming meeting of ICHEIC by June 21," Steinberg added.

While he declined to elaborate on any possible measures, Steinberg provided Reuters with copies of letters the panel on Feb. 11 wrote to two firms -- Der Anker Allgemeine Versicherungs AG and UNIQA Personenversicherung AG -- inviting them to join. The Austria insurance association also was sent the same letter.

Philadelphia Inquirer

**Wanted: Those to teach Holocaust classes**

By Lisa Fine
06/14/00

WEST CHESTER - Help wanted: teachers who can instruct about a subject that lawmakers say can never be forgotten.

The demand for instructors to teach Holocaust courses is increasing as more states require or recommend that the subject be taught at middle and high schools, educators say.

Also fueling the need is the dwindling number of Holocaust survivors, now typically between the ages of 60 and 90, who have served as the main teachers.

"Somebody will have to take their place," said Rabbi David Mayer of B'nai Jacob Congregation in Phoenixville. "It's an evolving subject, and it takes a long time for any educational system to recognize a new subject's importance."

To help ease the demand, West Chester University will offer a master's degree in Holocaust and genocide studies in the fall, making it the second public university in the country and the only one in the state to offer the degree. The other, Richard Stockton College in New Jersey, began offering a master's degree in 1998.

Students graduating from West Chester's two-year program would receive a master of arts degree after earning 30 credits.

This, coupled with an education degree or teaching background, would qualify a graduate to teach about the Holocaust in the classroom or work as a museum curator, said West Chester professor Irene G. Shur, professor
The degree, approved by the State System of Higher Education's Board of Governors in April, comes at a time when teaching about the Holocaust and the events leading up to the Nazis' slaughter of six million Jews and eight million others during World War II is becoming part of public schools' curriculum.

In the last decade, for example, five states, including New Jersey, have mandated the teaching of the Holocaust in middle and high schools. Ten states, including Pennsylvania, have passed resolutions recommending that it be taught.

"People were shocked when I told them I didn't think Pennsylvania should require schools to teach it," Shur said. "But I don't want teachers who aren't prepared to teach this subject. We need to create good teachers first."

In 1994, New Jersey enacted a law mandating that the subject be taught in kindergarten through the 12th grade. Lawmakers also appointed a 19-member Commission on Holocaust Education to prepare teachers and materials for the classes. Ten thousand teachers were sent to workshops and training programs at Holocaust resource centers at colleges in the state.

"Some places pass the bill and don't do anything to prepare schools for it," said Paul Winkler, executive director of the New Jersey Commission on Holocaust Education. "Our education starts in elementary schools, where we teach about understanding others. At the high school level, we talk about specifics of Holocaust history."

In 1996, the education committee of the Pennsylvania House adopted a resolution recommending that school districts teach the subject, said Jodie Daubert, a state Education Department spokeswoman. Pennsylvania teachers currently prepare themselves by attending courses at colleges or museums or doing self-directed reading.

The Education Department is now revising a curriculum to provide to schools, but districts are allowed to create their own versions, Daubert said.

In West Chester Area high schools, for example, the subject is taught for one semester as an elective. The students get an overview of World War II history, Adolf Hitler's rise to power, prejudice, and the Nazis' efforts to separate and exterminate Jews by putting them in ghettos and concentration camps.

"When there are no more survivors, when there is no one left who was a liberator or had experience witnessing a postwar trial about the Holocaust, it is our goal to ensure that the next generations will get the information and the impact," said Paul Shapiro, director of the Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. The center works to further Holocaust teaching at institutions of higher education.

Holocaust museums and education centers have stepped up to offer teacher training. Each year, about 30,000 teachers in middle and high schools contact the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum for seminars, training and materials, Shapiro said. Recently, the museum has had five teachers calling for every one slot in a conference or seminar, Shapiro said.

"Most people that have been trained in the Holocaust did so through Jewish studies programs within history departments where there have been faculty," Shapiro said. "The field is beginning to take on some shape of an academic discipline in and of itself in a multidisciplinary way."

At West Chester, students around the state will be able to use videoconferencing to take the courses, which will feature visiting professors, including writer Elie Wiesel, and lessons from survivors and service people who
I helped open concentration camps in Europe in the last years of World War II.

Because the university had been offering Holocaust courses since 1977, West Chester had already built up a mass of research resources. But in October, the university received a donation of a Holocaust library collection. The university also has other resources to support the degree, including a film collection, children’s books, and materials collected from survivors and their families and veterans of World War II.

"This program is the pioneer, but I think other universities will pick it up," Shur said. "In the future, I see the subject being taught like math. The teachers just have to get comfortable with the subject. Soon, there will be a network of teachers who have had the training. We can help each other."

Nina Kaleska, 71, of Bala Cynwyd, who spent two years in Auschwitz as a slave laborer, said the Holocaust was not just a Jewish subject.

"I believe that since the end of the war, genocide and abuse of human rights are rampant in many corners of the world and may be the direct result of what had occurred because of the Holocaust," Kaleska said. "If one religious group is unjustly persecuted, we are all in danger."

Kaleska, who often is asked to speak to groups about her experience, said she had difficulty talking about the Holocaust but felt a responsibility to educate people.

"There will be those who ask, what purpose can be served by conjuring up the demons of the Nazi death camps?" Kaleska said. "To shield the young from the knowledge of man's proven capacity for evil is to leave them exposed to the vulnerability of ignorance."

Newly discovered papers reveal the scandal of Britons handing over Jews to the Nazis - but one man stands out as a hero

By Julia Llewellyn Smith

Daily Express

06/19/00

It is one of the most tragic incidents in the history of the Channel Islands and, until recently, one of the least known. Sixty years ago this month, the Germans invaded the islands. Before they landed, most of the Jewish population had fled to the mainland. Many residents believed there were no Jews left in Jersey and Guernsey, or that they did not suffer.

But now a cache of documents, discovered under a staircase in the Attorney General's office in Jersey's capital St Helier, show not only the terrible fate of the islands' Jews but the part that the local authorities played in their persecution.

Yet as a BBC2 programme, Home Ground: A Dangerous Occupation, shows, the documents also reveal the existence of an unknown hero - Albert Bedane, an unassuming physiotherapist who this year posthumously received Israel's highest honour, being named Righteous Among The Nations for his part in saving the life of a Jewish woman and several fugitives.

In mainland Britain, Churchill was urging the rest of the British Isles to fight the Germans on the beaches - but when the enemy arrived in the Channel Islands they were greeted with handshakes and chauffeured cars. So harmonious were relations that the period became known as the "model occupation". Illegitimacy rates quadrupled as many island women, whose husbands were serving, formed liaisons with the occupying troops.
There was a good reason for the compliance. Islanders were terrified of receiving the same harsh treatment as the populations in other parts of occupied Europe and knew that with a German soldier to every two civilians, any resistance would be futile. Day-to-day government was left to the local authorities, which were scared to rock the boat in case the SS was sent in.

But while most people did not suffer under the new regime, a small proportion was living in fear. These were the islands' Jews, who for various reasons had not fled. By the end of 1940, they were asked to register as Jewish. Trusting the authorities to protect them, most did not hesitate.

But, as the newly-discovered papers show, their eagerness to be law-abiding was to lead them unwittingly into a noose which grew tighter over the next three years.

Rather than protecting them, the authorities were over-zealous in naming people as Jews. Several people were registered as Jewish, though they did not comply with the Nazi definition - someone with three or four Jewish grandparents. The islands' most senior politicians decided to hand over anybody with just one.

"Local officials were not just being good at their jobs when they compiled lists of Jews and their property," says David Fraser, a senior law lecturer at Sydney University and author of The Jews Of The Channel Islands And The Rule Of Law, 1940-45. "No limits appear to have existed."

John Max Finkelstein, who told authorities he was Anglican, was sent to Terezin and Buchenwald concentration camps, where he survived for 2d years. Ruby Still, who claimed to be a Christian, was sent to Biberach camp, where she also survived.

Esther Lloyd, who told the authorities that she had a Jewish grandfather, was registered as "originally Jewish, now Christian" and sent to Biberach, leaving behind a husband and two children.

She was lucky. In Germany, she persuaded the authorities that she had been wrongly registered and returned to Jersey in 1944. In her diary, written in a transit camp on the way to Biberach in 1943, she wrote bitterly: "Never shall I be honest again. If I had not declared myself [as Jewish] this wouldn't have happened."

The Jews who remained on Jersey lived a life of terror and isolation. By the end of 1940, new laws decreed that all Jewish businesses must be "Aryanised" - run by a non-Jewish administrator. The following year the administrators were granted all the powers of ownership. The dispossessed Jews - most of whom had fled to the mainland - received no compensation.

In 1941, Jews were banned from jobs in which they might come into contact with the public, including retail, transport and hotel work. The following year, they were banned from public places of entertainment, bound to a curfew and allowed to shop only between 3-4pm. The punishment for breaking these rules was internment.

Cut off from the community, unable to provide for their families, some slipped into madness. Nathan Davidson, who had just one Jewish grandparent, lost his grocery shop. When he was notified of his imminent deportation, he went insane and committed suicide.

Hyam Goldman, whose shop was threatened with closure at the same time, managed to save it when he provided evidence that his non-Jewish wife was its legal owner. Yet the trauma was to prove too much for him and at the end of the war he too committed suicide.

The great-granddaughter of Samuel and Beatrice Simon - whose deportation was delayed because of Samuel's poor state of health - remembered them as living in a "terrible state of fear and kept their curtains closed all day". Samuel died before he could be deported.

John Jacobs, a butcher, had tuberculosis when he registered but was told he would be deported as soon as he was well enough to travel. The Germans made regular checks on his health. After he died, his family found his medicine bottles under his mattress. He had been hiding them to prevent his getting better.

Only two registered Jews escaped the attention of the authorities: Marianne Blampied, who was married to a prominent Jersey artist, and Margarete Hurban, who was the wife of a German soldier.
In Guernsey and Sark, there were five registered Jews. Elisabet Duquemin who, with Elsa Brouard, survived Biberach, recalled: "Every day, for 18 months until I was deported to a concentration camp, I lived in fear. I was in trauma all the time. Every day I was frightened and did not know if they would take me away, or my baby daughter, or my husband."

Austrian Therese Steiner was left behind in Guernsey after the family who employed her as a nanny went to England. The Reverend Douglas Ord remembers seeing her just after she received her deportation order. "She was in great distress. I did what I could to comfort her, but what can you say or do?" Her friend Barbara Newman accompanied her to the port where she boarded the boat to France. "We were laughing and joking as if it were a day trip," she says. "What else could you do? You had to make as light of it as you could."

Yet not all the Jews were detected. Mary Richardson, a Dutch-born Jew married to an English sea captain, did not register. When discovered, the Germans told her they were going to take her to a "very nice, special camp". However, by the time the Nazis arrived at her home, she had disappeared.

Mrs Richardson was saved by Albert Bedane. He hid her in his St Helier clinic for nearly two years, alongside an escaped French PoW and several Russian slave workers, used by the Germans to rebuild the island's fortifications.

The only way Bedane could feed his fugitives was by asking for food from farmers in exchange for his massage services. If he had been caught he would have been killed - another islander, Louisa Gould, died in Ravensbruck concentration camp after an informer told the Germans that she was sheltering an escaped slave worker.

Bedane hid the escapees in a hidden cellar while treating German officers in the clinic. "I had a few nightmares but I thought that if I was going to be killed, I would rather be killed for a sheep than a lamb," he said. After the war, he was treated in England for stress.

Bedane's wife Clara, who spent the war in England, died in 1944 unaware of her husband's heroism. Bedane died in 1980. The recently-discovered papers included a letter from Mrs Richardson thanking Bedane for saving her life. It was all the evidence necessary for Israel to posthumously grant this unassuming man its highest honour.

"There is a Talmudic expression that says 'He who saves one man it is as though he has saved the world'," says Freddie Cohen, president of the Jersey Jewish Congregation. "Albert Bedane is the epitome of that. The fact that he saved only one Jewish woman makes no difference. He is as great a man as Schindler."

Yet while Oskar Schindler's body lies at Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, there is no memorial to Albert Bedane. In the Channel Islands, people prefer to forget their heroes - so as not to put the spotlight on those who were not so bold.
Archives to show how German POWs viewed Holocaust

Generali signs Holocaust-era policy settlement

WJC says Generali agrees holocaust claims


Archives to show how German POWs viewed Holocaust

Joan Gralla

06/21/00

NEW YORK (Reuters) - A chronology of Italy's role in the persecution of Jews and how German prisoners-of-war viewed the Holocaust will become clearer Monday when 400,000 pages of World War Two documents are declassified.

The documents, from the Office of Strategic Services, the predecessor of the Central Intelligence Agency, will be released at the National Archives, according to the Nazi War Criminal Records Interagency Working Group, which is declassifying the material.

"Some of them will detail for the first time the chronology about the actual commencement of the Holocaust in Italy ... These declassified documents will pinpoint what happened in ways that have never been (revealed) before," Elizabeth Holtzman, the New York lawyer and former congresswoman, told Reuters. She serves on the Interagency Working Group.

One source said the new information on Italy's participation in the Holocaust was based on British intercepts of coded German reports. The British used bugs to listen to conversations between German POWs.

"(The documents) contain transcripts of the British bugging of the POWs in which they have considerable discussions regarding the Holocaust and evincing ... differences of opinion as to whether this was appropriate," said the source, who declined to be identified.

The source added: "It also indicates a substantial amount of information regarding the opposition to Hitler in the army; I would describe it as significant."

Charles Maier, a Harvard University history professor, described Italy's role during the Holocaust as "mixed." "I don't think there's very much in the big picture we don't know, but the question of evaluation is a very difficult one," he said.

Some Italian officers in occupied areas, such as Croatia, helped shelter Jews, he said.

According to Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial, "Hundreds of priests and bishops throughout the Italian peninsula put their lives in jeopardy to shelter, feed and clothe the countless refugees."
Some 450 Jews were hidden in the Vatican during the Nazi occupation.

But Pope Pius XII, the Vatican's ambassador to Germany before he became pope in 1939, has long been accused of failing to try to stop the massacre of Jews throughout Europe by not publicly opposing the Holocaust.

Italy had some 50,000 Jews before World War Two; 7,680 were killed in the Holocaust, the Encyclopedia of the Holocaust said.

One main reason that more Jews did not lose their lives is because the Nazis only ruled the northern part of Italy for about one year. Through Benito Mussolini, the Nazis controlled that area after the fascist dictator was overthrown in 1943.

06/22/00
Jerusalem Post

**Generali signs Holocaust-era policy settlement**

Italian insurance giant, Assicurazione Generali, today signed a settlement agreement in London with Jewish organizations representing heirs of Holocaust victims who were insured by the company, and whose policies were never paid out, Kol Israel reported.

The agreement is said to provide for payment of approximately $150 million, based on the current value of the unredeemed policies.

The company will publicize the settlement, as well as names of the policy-holders, on the Internet, and will open its archives in Trieste, Italy, for inspection.

Claims will be examined by a committee in Israel headed by former judge Dov Levin.


**Thursday June 22, 11:33 am Eastern Time**

**WJC says Generali agrees holocaust claims**

LONDON, June 22 (Reuters) - Italian insurer Generali has agreed to pay $150 million holocaust-era claims, Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress (WJC) told Reuters on Thursday,

"Generali has agreed to pay all valid unpaid holocaust-related claims at the valuation already established by the International Commission," Steinberg said.

He said the agreement in principle, reached in London at the latest meeting of the International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance Claims, provides for complete access to Generali's archives, and the publication of more than 20,000 holocaust policy names.

"We have a comprehensive settlement in place. Policies will be paid in real value, and relaxed standards of proof will be used in evaluating the claims as determined by the Foundation in Jerusalem under the chairmanship of a former Israeli supreme court judge", Steinberg added.

He said details on the agreement will be worked out over the next few weeks.
A spokesman for Generali said, “We regard this as a very important agreement. We will be cooperating with the International Commission and the Jerusalem Foundation to ensure its successful implementation.”

German insurers have already reached an agreement to transfer nearly $300 million in funds through the International Commission in settlement of holocaust era claims and insurance-related issues.

“I think the Generali settlement is a model for other insurance companies. The next step is to deal with the other companies,” Steinberg added.

He said the list included AXA, Wintherthur, a unit of Credit Suisse, Zurich Financial Services (quote from Yahoo! UK & Ireland: ADZ.L <http://finance.uk.yahoo.com/quotes/ukie/q?s=ADZ.L&d=t>), and the Dutch insurers, principally Aegon, Fortis and ING.

On Tuesday the WJC denounced a Dutch body for failing to answer recent claims on pre-holocaust insurance policies. “The Dutch have already indicated by their participation in the Commission that these issues will be quickly resolved,” Steinberg commented. Dutch insurers joined in late May.

He said no commitment has yet been received from two principal Austrian insurers - Der Anker Allgemeine Versicherungs AG and UNIQA Personenversicherung AG - to join the Commission, which next meets in Washington in July.
Czechs To Return Jewish Property

Warning May Have Saved Some Jews

Dutch Central Bank Returns Nazi Funds to WJC

Museums Decline to Search for Plundered Loot

http://dailynews.yahoo.com/b/ap/20000623/wl/czech_jewish_property_1.html

Friday June 23 2:06 PM ET

Czechs To Return Jewish Property

PRAGUE, Czech Republic (AP) - The Czech Senate voted overwhelmingly Friday to return Jewish property confiscated during the country's Nazi occupation to its original owners, officials said.

Spokeswoman Kvetoslava Kozakova said 67 deputies in the 81-seat upper chamber of the Czech Parliament voted in favor of the motion. The others either abstained or were absent. The new law that was already passed by the lower chamber of Parliament on May 24 needs only the president's approval.

Claims by original Jewish owners or their descendants can be filed until the end of 2002.

So far, only property the general citizenry lost after the 1948 communist takeover has been returned under existing legislation.

"We have expressed our will to settle the evil legacy of World War II racial horrors in a dignified and just way," CTK news agency quoted Vice Prime Minister Pavel Rychetsky as saying after the vote.

Under the proposal, Jews would receive all land holdings and buildings confiscated between Sept. 29, 1938, and May 8, 1945, and that are now owned by the state.

Some property, such as land declared a nature reserve or land under buildings that are not subject to restitution are exempted.

The government previously estimated some 200 state-owned buildings would be returned. Also, the Jewish Museum in Prague would receive 63 paintings now in the National Gallery, including works by Emil Filla, Auguste Renoir and Maurice de Vlaminck.

Another 2,500 art objects would be returned to citizens of Jewish origin or to their descendants.

All property seized by the Nazis was taken over by the Czechoslovak government that formed after World War II. Czechoslovakia split peacefully into the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1993.

About 3,000 Jews live in the Czech Republic now, compared to 120,000 before World War II.

Earlier this year, the Czech Cabinet allocated $7.5 million to set up a foundation to compensate Holocaust
victims whose property cannot be returned.

New York Times
June 26, 2000

Warning May Have Saved Some Jews

WASHINGTON (AP) -- British and American intelligence agents had information in 1943 that could have been used to save some Italian Jews from the Nazis' Auschwitz death camp, historians said Monday.

At a news conference releasing some 400,000 pages of newly declassified documents at the National Archives, historians said Western officials might have been able to warn Jews in Rome that they were about to be rounded up and deported.

The declassified documents from the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the World War II forerunner to the CIA, included messages of the Nazi SS security service between Berlin and Rome in late 1943 that were intercepted and decoded by British intelligence and shared with U.S. intelligence.

They also included conversations among German POWs secretly recorded by the British and information gathered by the OSS using an anti-Nazi German informant.

The intercepted messages showed Nazi security forces were planning to seize Jews in Rome.

"The release...raises the historical question once again of what Allied governments knew about the Holocaust during World War II and might have been done with information they possessed," said historian Richard Breitman in a report he co-authored for the U.S. government's Nazi War Criminals Records Interagency Working Group.

The co-author of the report, historian Timothy Naftali, said perhaps British Prime Minister Winston Churchill or American President Franklin Roosevelt should have made a statement warning the Jews.

"It is clear that had a statement been made on the radio to the effect that Allied forces feared for the safety of Romans, and particularly the Jews of Rome, this might well have had an effect on decisions made by people to get out," Naftali said.

"I find it disheartening that there was no more use of some of this information at the time," said Breitman.

But Naftali also warned against a "rush to conclusions." He and others said it is unclear in hindsight whether taking action on the information would have compromised British intelligence gathering.

Others said it was unclear whether Jews could have acted on the information had they received it.

The interagency working group was established in January 1999 to coordinate a large-scale effort by U.S. federal agencies to find, declassify and release U.S. records relating to Germany's Nazi regime.

Federal agencies have resisted opening their files for half a century, saying national security was at stake. Supporters says the panel's work provides an insight into how U.S. intelligence agencies and others used Nazi war criminals in the Cold War years.

Historians said this was the most significant finding by the panel, which has released more than one million pages of documents gathered from the Department of Defense, the OSS, Justice, State, FBI and other agencies.
Dutch Central Bank Returns Nazi Funds to WJC

06/22/00

AMSTERDAM (Reuters) - The Dutch central bank said on Thursday it had returned 120,000 guilders ($51,390) in funds looted by the Nazis to the World Jewish Congress (WJC).

The bank added it had not apologized for the role it played in converting Jewish assets into German bonds during the war, since an apology was not an issue at the talks it held with Dutch Jewish groups.

"Last Friday the president of the Central Bank (Nout Wellink) sent a letter to the World Jewish Congress, which said we would return the 120,000 guilders. I presume it (WJC) has received it by now," said spokesman Olaf Sleijpen.

The New York-based WJC sent the Dutch central bank a request last month to return the 120,000 guilders, the inflation-adjusted equivalent of the 7,000 wartime guilders held in a blocked account into which funds looted by the Nazis were placed.

"At issue here is not the money -- it's a relatively small amount of money, $50,000, but the revolting behavior of the Netherlands bank during the war and their failure to apologize for it until this day," Elan Steinberg, WJC executive director, told Reuters in earlier this month.

However, according to the bank, an apology was not mentioned in the letter sent by the WJC or during discussions with Dutch Jewish groups.

"We haven't discussed an apology and we can't comment on whether we would consider apologizing yet. That would have to be discussed during new talks with the Jewish groups," Sleijpen said.

He said that during the war, the Dutch central bank had been managed by Dutch who collaborated with the Nazis. "You can't consider the current central bank as a continuation of that bank," he said.

Last week Dutch Jewish leaders reached an $135 million deal with Dutch banks and the Amsterdam bourse to settle claims owed Holocaust survivors for helping the Nazis loot their accounts. ($1-2.335 Guilder)

Museums Decline to Search for Plundered Loot

By Sharon Waxman
06/20/00

As prominent U.S. museums scrutinize their collections for art that Nazis may have stolen from private families, many museums on the West Coast with significant numbers of works bought after World War II say they do not have the resources or the interest to undertake similar research.

But those West Coast museums that are undertaking such provenance research are finding vast numbers of paintings with gaps in ownership during World War II. The Getty Museum, just completing a first phase of inquiry, has found that more than half of its paintings collection has wartime gaps - 248 of its 425 works. These include a masterpiece by 17th-century Dutch master Jan Steen and, an examination of the Getty's records shows, could include works by Pierre Auguste Renoir, Gerard Hoet, Paul Cezanne.

While not all paintings with wartime gaps are necessarily stolen, the large proportion of such works at the Getty suggests that at least some may have come from families plundered during the Holocaust and may be the subject of claims by their heirs. Stolen art found in other museums is being returned or its claimants are being financially compensated. For example, the Seattle Art Museum last year returned a painting by Henri Matisse, "Odalisque," to the heirs of French collector Paul Rosenberg.

The search for plundered art has surged to the fore in Europe and, more recently, the United States, due to investigative journalism that has forced open long-dormant records in Western Europe.

Hitler's Third Reich systematically ransacked art from the homes of Jews and Nazi enemies throughout Europe, keeping some distinguished pieces and selling so-called "degenerate" - modern - art for the profits.
At the end of the war, the Allies attempted to return Nazi loot to the countries of their original owners, but little was returned to survivors, who were discouraged by the traditional secrecy of the international art trade, lack of access to government archives, destruction of private files and a sense of hopelessness on the part of family members. Some stolen art ended up in European state museums or was resold through legitimate art dealers who paid little attention to the question of wartime provenance.

A State Department conference in 1998 drew attention to the issue, and American museums were urged by their own association - the American Association of Art Museum Directors - to inspect their collections to help survivors with the difficult task of locating stolen art.

But unlike their East Coast counterparts, several West Coast institutions with major collections of European paintings, drawings and decorative arts, such as the Norton Simon collection in Pasadena and UCLA Hammer Museum in Westwood, say they are at least a year away from completing basic research into their own collections, much less a decision about making their findings public. Provenance research can be a painstaking business that involves mountains of old documents ranging from auction catalogues to faded newspaper clippings.

"I'm sure there's a lot here," acknowledges Sara Campbell, chief curator at the Norton Simon, a premier collection of 19th- and 20th-century European art with 1,000 paintings. "This is something we don't know enough about."

Campbell says she has put the provenance research "on a back burner" because of tight resources at the museum, although one researcher is reviewing the period between 1933 and 1945 full time, she says.

"It's a high priority, but we don't have the resources in place," says Terry Morello, a spokeswoman for the Hammer Museum, named for Armand Hammer, who built Occidental Petroleum. Hammer made a fortune wheeling and dealing all over Europe and behind the Iron Curtain, and "behaved like a country unto himself," she notes. "We fully expect to find things with gaps in them."

The San Diego Museum of Art, which has 300 European paintings and thousands of sculptures and prints, has decided not to undertake research over wartime gaps at all, choosing to wait and see if any claims of ownership are made.

"Dedicating the resources necessary to do this is not a priority of the institution at this time," says Steven Kern, San Diego's curator of European art. "I would hope nobody would think we're dragging our feet, but provenance is a funny issue. When is enough enough? How far do you go? When are claims legitimate or not?" He adds: "What is the art equivalent of an ambulance chaser?"

Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress, calls this comment "particularly egregious." He points out that the American Association of Art Museum Directors - to which San Diego and most other U.S. museums belong - has pledged to actively look for works of dubious provenance.

Provenance problems have notably failed to ignite enthusiasm in the American West, where the issues sometimes seem distant, occurring a half-century and a continent away.

Ironically, though, the provenance issue is particularly relevant in this part of the country, because many major art collections are so new. Many were founded in the early and middle parts of the 20th century by cash-rich entrepreneurs who sought to establish cultural credentials by buying art from Europe's cash-poor upper class.

Norton Simon, who made his fortune from Hunt Foods, began buying art in the 1950s. Hammer created his collection from the 1930s onward. California entrepreneurs who ultimately donated paintings to California museums, such as the Ahmansons and Gard de Sylvas in Los Angeles, the Putnams in San Diego or the Huntingtons and Oakeses in San Francisco, were all buying art in the years currently under scrutiny.

"Clearly that was a period of movement, especially on the West Coast," notes Kern, San Diego's curator. "That period of World War II was a period of growth in our collection, in all areas."

J. Paul Getty, the eccentric and miserly oil baron, was a particularly eager bargain-hunter in the 1930s. In 1938 and '39, Getty traveled extensively around Europe, keeping a daily diary of his activities and sometimes noting when he nabbed a good deal in the art market.

On Oct. 24, 1938, Getty notes that he visited the Vienna palace of Baron Louis de Rothschild, held under arrest by the Nazis since their invasion of Austria in March, and "made inquiry about the furniture," according to a biography by Robert Lenzner. The palace had been looted of its 18th-century French furniture, paintings and tapestries, and Getty went to Berlin a few days later, where he knew several high-ranking Nazis, to continue his inquiries about the furniture.

"The Rothschild furniture may be sold in January [1939]," he notes in his diary, according to the Lenzner book.
In the end, Getty bought two French desks from this collection, though not until 1950 in New York, after it had been restored to the Rothschilds, according to the Getty’s records. But many other pieces in the museum’s top-ranking decorative arts collection raise provenance questions, such as an 18th-century oak and pine table with gilt veneer. The Getty’s own catalogue notes that it was “confiscated by the Third Reich, 1940-1945,” but doesn’t say from whom, or if it was returned.

“Clearly that’s one we don’t have an answer for,” says chief curator Deborah Gribbon, in a wide-ranging interview on the subject. “We don’t have firm evidence yet.”

Gribbon stresses that a gap in a painting’s provenance does not mean that it comes from a looted collection. “I don’t regard the gaps as open to challenge or a source of concern,” she says.

But the museum is continuing its research into about a dozen paintings that apparently are causes for concern, including a magnificent Steen, “The Satyr and the Peasant Family.” Getty records indicate that the painting may have been plundered from Belgium between 1939 and 1945, but officials say that information comes from a notation on a photo of the painting found in London’s Witt Library. A list of 248 paintings with provenance gaps will be posted on the Getty’s Web site by the end of June.

Meanwhile the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, with 700 European paintings, is about two-thirds of the way through its provenance research. Spokesman Keith McKeown declined to say how many paintings had been discovered to have gaps in their wartime history - describing it as “a handful.” He said the museum would put its list on the Internet “during the summer” before starting on the museum’s other collections - sculpture, drawings and decorative arts.

But McKeown said research at younger museums like LACMA, created in 1965, is particularly difficult. “This is a relatively new institution. Our works are not as studied and published as institutions in the East,” he explains. “We’re still basically dealing with written records. A number of other museums have already computerized their records.”

The de Young Museum in San Francisco is about halfway through provenance research into its 900 European paintings, but a spokesman said it does not have the resources to complete the project swiftly.

But World Jewish Congress Director Steinberg says that basic research - finding out if a painting has a provenance gap or not - is simple enough. He said he would be more convinced by the argument that museums lack resources if curators showed a willingness to complete even this phase of research.

"If there is a good-faith undertaking by museums to do this research and financial aid is necessary, it would be wonderful for the federal government to help them," he says. "But the fact of the matter is, even when the easy part is asked of museums they don't do it."
East European Jews form panel to represent them on Claims Conference

Newly Declassified OSS Records Shed New Light on World War II

NY, others give Austrian insurers Holocaust deadline

Generali to Pay $150 Mln to Redeem Holocaust Victims’ Policies

**Jerusalem Post**

**East European Jews form panel to represent them on Claims Conference**

By Elli Wohlgelernter

KIEV (June 27) - The Jewish communities of Eastern Europe, including Ukraine and Russia, formalized their demand for the restitution of Holocaust property in their countries by forming a committee yesterday to represent them on the Claims Conference.

The formation of the Coordination Committee for Restitution in Eastern Europe was announced following a discussion at a symposium being held here on Jewish Communities 10 Years After the Fall of Communism.

The European Jewish Congress, which hosted the symposium along with the Jewish Confederation of Ukraine, also issued a statement in support of Vladimir Goussinsky, the embattled president of the Russian Jewish Congress. Goussinsky, an opponent of Russian President Vladimir Putin, was arrested June 13 for allegedly embezzling funds. He was released under house arrest three days later.

"The EJC addresses a special message of solidarity to its vice president, Mr. Vladimir Goussinsky, and profoundly regrets his conspicuous absence during our deliberation in Kiev," the statement said.

"The EJC assures its support in his engagement for the liberty of expression, human rights and freedom of the press, and hopes that Mr. Goussinsky will be able to join us during our next meeting."

Rabbi Ya'akov Dov Bleich, chief rabbi of Kiev and Ukraine, said the "unexpected arrest of Vladimir Goussinsky and the initiation of a criminal case against him are undisputably politically motivated. The Jewish world cannot ignore these events. The history of the 20th century has taught us that any encroachment on democracy brings with it a threat to the physical existence of the Jewish community."

The forming of the restitution committee, which consists of some 20 countries, is an attempt by Eastern European countries to step up efforts to establish their claims to Holocaust funds that are now becoming available. Part of that effort is to push for greater representation at the Claims Conference, which is a central address for the distribution of funds in many areas of restitution.

"The makeup of the Claims Conference has an imbalance," said Aba Dunner, secretary-general of the Conference of European Rabbis. "The Conference has to recognize the areas within which it will be operating, and it has to take the expertise from those areas. It cannot ignore that there are now new areas, and a new emphasis that must be taken into account when we talk about the distribution of new funds. We have to make sure that we don't waste those monies away on spurious projects, which did happen in the past because people
I wasn't in touch with what was needed."

Avi Beker, international director of the World Jewish Congress, said that "there is an element of irony here, because the restitution efforts started precisely because of the collapse of the Soviet Union. In retrospect, in Eastern Europe we have reached very poor results in this process, while in Western Europe, and the other neutral countries, such as Switzerland and others, what we achieved was outstanding, historically." Beker said at issue is thousands of former Jewish buildings, worth billions of dollars, but that consideration must be given to the economic development of countries like Ukraine, which does not have a lot of resources to make immediate restitution.

"That's why it should be quite slow, piece by piece, and we should start with a sincere effort to begin a process, and not go immediately into a final settlement, which is impossible." The process, he said, has already begun.

At a closing dinner last night, Bleich and Rabbi Pinchas Goldschmidt, chief rabbi of Moscow, were honored for their 10 years of service in their respective countries.

U.S. Newswire
26 Jun 10:28

Newly Declassified OSS Records Shed New Light on World War II

To: National Desk
Contact: National Archives Office of Public Affairs, 301-713-6000; Web site: <http://www.nara.gov>

COLLEGE PARK, Md., June 26 /U.S. Newswire/ -- Today the Nazi War Criminals Interagency Working Group (IWG) is making available to researchers approximately 400,000 pages of previously classified documents from the records of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS, 1942-45) and of the Strategic Services Unit (SSU, 1945-46), forerunners of the CIA.

The release is a major opening by the IWG, the group established by President Clinton in 1999 to expedite the declassification of records related to war crimes of the Nazi government and its allies. The OSS documents contain historically valuable material that would not have been declassified without the passage of the Nazi War Crimes Disclosure Act and the efforts of the National Archives and the Central Intelligence Agency under that act.

The documents come from a larger OSS collection, much of which was declassified by the CIA in the 1980s. The IWG release consists of documents previously withheld by the CIA because of the sensitive information they contained on sources and methods. They cover diverse topics and activities relating to intelligence operations during the War and, because they were withdrawn from other files, are not organized by topic or activity.

The National Archives has an inventory of this eclectic collection. The documents contain general information about OSS activities worldwide, about Nazi Germany and its allies. Researchers who review the many thousands of pages will find information that is valuable to investigations in a broad range of subjects.

Among the materials researchers will find:

-- New information on the Nazi roundup of Roman Jews
-- 1,200 reports based on information supplied to Allen Dulles, the head of the OSS in Switzerland by the anti-Nazi German Foreign Office official Fritz Kolbe
-- Reports on the U.S. Safehaven program to identify and block from flight German financial assets and other
war spoils
-- Reports on OSS clandestine missions into France and Norway
-- Records of the OSS insurance intelligence unit (IIU)
-- Prisoner of war interrogation reports
-- Refugee and emigre debriefings, including interviews with civilian internees returning from the Far East
-- Information related to looted art.
-- Reports on Japanese balloon warfare over the U.S. Pacific Northwest

A portion of the records includes messages of the SS Security Service (SD) sent from Rome to Berlin during August, September, and October, 1943, that were intercepted and decoded by British intelligence and shared with U.S. intelligence. The messages provide historical insight into what the Allied governments knew about the Holocaust, when they learned it, and what might have been done with the information they possessed. The decodes are also valuable in adding to what is known about Nazi intervention in Italy, providing detail about the early German decision to deport Italian Jews to Auschwitz. The existing scholarly literature lacks a clear consensus on exactly who ordered the deportation and murder of Italian Jews and when it occurred.

The documents also contain lengthy verbatim excerpts from "private" conversations among German POWs secretly recorded by the British and later given to American intelligence officials. In these conversations, German army, navy, and SS officers unwittingly gave British intelligence analysts commentaries on past and current actions by top Nazi officials. In some cases, these POWs also described their own attitudes toward Nazi mass killings and atrocities. Some captives continued to support the fatherland to the end, but others tried to distance themselves, focusing blame on Heinrich Himmler and the SS. These documents will provide researchers a better picture of the relationship between the German army and the SS, additional details about Nazi concentration and extermination camp operations, an assessment of German morale toward the end of the war, among many other topics.

Within the OSS collection there are previously unreleased documents concerning the OSS penetration of the German Foreign Office using the anti-Nazi German informant Fritz Kolbe. Codenamed George Wood, Kolbe maintained contact with Allen Dulles -- then head of the OSS in Switzerland -- and is widely considered by intelligence historians one of the best informants for the OSS. This opening contains the first complete set of Kolbe documents and shows who within the U.S. government had access to his information.

The IWG was established by Executive Order in January 1999 to coordinate the large-scale effort of federal agencies to expedite the release of U.S. records relating to the Nazis and their allies. The President named the group's members from the major agencies holding classified records and appointed three members to represent the public. The group's purpose is to locate, inventory, recommend for declassification, and make available all classified Nazi war criminal records. The Act defines Nazi War criminal records as records pertaining to individuals in the Nazi government, or in governments allied with the Nazis, who participated in racial, religious, or political persecution or to theft of the assets of persecuted people.

For press information, contact Giuliana Bullard, 703-532-1477, or Susan Cooper at the National Archives and Records Administration at 301-713-6000.

Additional information is available at <http://www.nara.gov/iwg>.

NY, others give Austrian insurers Holocaust deadline

06/26/00
NEW YORK (Reuters) - A group of 900 U.S. public finance officers led by New York City Comptroller Alan Hevesi has given Austrian insurers until July 14 to explain why they have not joined a global effort to settle claims that Europe's insurers cheated Holocaust survivors.

Hevesi's letter, dated June 14 and obtained by Reuters Monday, did not say what the group would do if the insurers missed the deadline. Two years ago, the group pushed Swiss banks into a $1.3 billion accord with Holocaust families by threatening to stop doing business with them and to use its clout to delay foreign companies' mergers with U.S. firms.

Hevesi's letter, sent to Der Anker Allgemeine Versicherungs AG, UNIQA Personenversicherung AG and an Austrian insurance association, asked the insurers to join an international panel auditing Europe's insurers for unpaid Holocaust-era claims.

A spokesman for Hevesi had no immediate comment.

A copy of the letter was provided to Reuters by Elan Steinberg, executive director of the World Jewish Congress.

"We strongly believe that in order for restitution of unpaid policies held by Austrian insurers to be complete, accessible to claimants and transparent, it is essential that the insurance companies of Austria fully participate in restitution efforts and work of the International Commission on Holocaust-era Insurance Claims," the letter said.

"We would appreciate your comments regarding our concerns and ask that you reply to the Committee by July 14, 2000," the letter added.

When Hevesi's steering committee last met on May 25, it agreed to give both the Netherlands and Austria 30-day deadlines. But Hevesi then brokered a pact for Dutch banks and the stock exchange to pay about $132 million to settle claims they helped the Nazis steal money and securities from Jews.

Dutch insurers had already joined the panel probing whether Europe's insurers blocked Holocaust families from collecting on pre-World War II policies.

Making restitution to Holocaust families is a difficult issue for Austria's coalition government because it includes the anti-immigrant Freedom Party. Joerg Haider, who is best known outside Austria for making remarks that seemed to make light of Nazi atrocities, no longer heads the Freedom Party, but remains powerful.

Shortly after it was formed in February, Austria's coalition government appointed an official to deal with claims from Nazi-era slave laborers, and later on, it named an envoy to handle property restitution.

Austria has been shunned by the European Union, Israel and the United States since its coalition government let in the Freedom Party. Steinberg said that how Austria handles Holocaust restitution is important for its standing in the world.

He told Reuters by telephone: "In view of Austria's isolation in Europe because of the inclusion of an extreme right party in the government, if Austrian insurers fail to join global efforts to resolve Holocaust-era claims, it will further blacken Austria's reputation in the world."

Israel's Business Arena

Monday, Jun 26, 2000

Generali to Pay $150 Mn to Redeem Holocaust Victims' Policies
By Zvi Lavi

Italian insurance company Generali will remit to Israel $150 million for the redemption of the insurance policies of Jewish holders, that were purchased in pre-Holocaust Europe. This was determined last week, in a first agreement of its kind, signed in London between Generali and the international committee handling the matter, and headed by former US Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger. Represented on the committee are the Jewish organizations and representatives of Israel, and also the insurance companies Allianz, Winterthur, Zurich Life and AXA.

The agreed amount will be forwarded for processing to the Generali fund set up two years ago on the initiative of the Knesset, and headed by Supreme Judge emeritus Dov Levin. According to the agreement, any insurance claim that is recognized, on the part of the policy-holders or their lawful heirs, will be paid in full at its present value.
FBI Trains New Agents on Holocaust

Much-delayed Swiss Holocaust pact nears completion

Commissioner Senn Says More Holocaust Claims Surface Now That Records, Policy Lists are Being Disclosed

FBI Trains New Agents on Holocaust

By MICHAEL J SNIFFEN

WASHINGTON (AP) -- The FBI has begun teaching its new agents how a failure by police to protect citizen rights helped produce the Holocaust in which 6 million Jews, as well as other minorities and political dissidents were murdered by the Nazis.

The training segment for agents-to-be at the FBI Academy began last month and was announced Friday by FBI Director Louis J. Freeh; Sara J. Bloomfield, director of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum and Abraham H. Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

"We do this early on in their training ... to remind them of the horror and evil which can result from not just a government, but particularly law enforcement, abandoning its mission to protect people and becoming the engine of oppression," Freeh said.

The trainees are given a guided tour of the Holocaust Museum here and instruction about Adolf Hitler's use of the police in Germany in the 1930s and 1940s to round up Jews, political opponents and other targeted groups.

There is a classroom discussion and then trainees must write an essay on the question: "Of what relevance is this history to you as a human being and a law enforcement official?"

After the first session, one student wrote, "It has taught me that making sure our Constitution is strictly followed should be a number one priority throughout my career." Another said: "It will help me remember my greatest duty to preserve human life and protect the civil rights of every man, woman and child."

Bloomfield, the museum director, said, "Much of the Holocaust was perpetrated or supported by trained professionals who were 'doing their job.' The museum's program with the FBI challenges law enforcement agents to examine the moral dimensions of their professions."

The topic of police complicity in the Holocaust has been a concern of Freeh's for some time. In 1994, over objections from the State Department and the U.S. ambassador to Poland, Freeh visited the Nazi death camp at Auschwitz during a European trip and gave a speech at Jagellonian University in nearby Krakow, Poland, on the police role in Hitler's oppression.

Freeh researched and wrote the speech himself with help from Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel.

"We must be morally responsible for what we do," Freeh said Friday. "We have to understand and protect not just the people we serve, but the moral and ethical values and human dignities that are so important to us all."

Foxman applauded the FBI's commitment to "law enforcement's critical role as defenders of the Constitution and guardians of individual rights" and said the training "has tremendous potential to impact the next generation of law enforcement leadership."

At its International Law Enforcement Academy in Budapest, Hungary, the FBI has taught a course in human dignity to more than 1,000 police officers from former communist countries.
Much-delayed Swiss Holocaust pact nears completion

By Joan Gralla

NEW YORK, June 29 (Reuters) - After many delays, a $1.3 billion accord that Swiss banks reached with Holocaust survivors two years ago is close to being approved by a U.S. judge, a step that could remove one of the last obstacles to payment.

Morris Ratner, a lawyer who practices in New York and San Francisco, told Reuters on Thursday that he expected U.S. District Court Judge Edward Korman to issue his ruling on whether the agreement is fair as soon as late next week.

The accord aims to settle billion-dollar lawsuits against Swiss banks that were brought by Holocaust survivors. The survivors charged that the banks prevented them from withdrawing money they had deposited before the Second World War by demanding proof that could never be provided, such as death certificates from concentration camps.

Though the pact at first was seen as a landmark in Holocaust restitution, it has been severely criticised because it has yet to pay any benefits. Time matters because most Holocaust survivors are elderly; 10 percent to 15 percent of them die each year.

Most recently, the accord was delayed by Swiss insurers, Ratner said. The insurers resisted demands from plaintiffs’ lawyers who wanted to ensure the firms were held accountable for how they handled claims from Holocaust families. “That was the reason why we had the delay. They weren’t agreeable to anything we thought was sufficiently strict. This will allow the judge to have ongoing oversight,” Ratner said, referring to a new proposal.

Several Swiss insurers agreed in May to pay $50 million to settle charges they never made good on prewar policies bought by Holocaust survivors. The funds from the Swiss insurers, Baloise, Helvetia Patria, Rentenanstalt and Swiss Re, will be added to the bank pact, raising it to $1.3 billion from $1.25 billion.

SMALLER BANKS JIBBED AT SIZE OF DATABASE

Previously, the judge was delayed from approving the settlement by Switzerland’s smaller, private banks, which rejected proposals to create a 4.1 million-entry database of Holocaust-era accounts for verifying claims. Former Federal Reserve Chairman Paul Volcker proposed such a big database because many Holocaust families deposited money or other assets in the names of intermediaries, such as lawyers.

Volcker conducted an exhaustive, independent audit of Swiss banks, searching for accounts that could belong to Holocaust victims or their heirs. Under a compromise plan, the two biggest banks in the accord, Credit Suisse and UBS, would create a database with the 2.1 million Holocaust-era accounts that they have. But it is not known if Korman has accepted this proposal.

Separately, the U.S. State Department is so close to a final agreement with Germany over a nearly $5 billion fund for Nazi-era slave labourers that it is trying to plan a July signing ceremony in Berlin.

"It'll be sometime in the month of July, I just don't know when," Ratner said. A State Department official had no immediate comment.

One of the last battles concerns the definition of a German corporation, a source close to the talks said. The source, who declined to be named, said that some lawyers who represented Holocaust survivors -- who sued German companies for billions of dollars, forcing them into negotiations -- feared the present definition was too broad.

The rest of the work that remains to be done involves the final language for agreements reached orally, the source said.

Commissioner Senn Says More Holocaust Claims Surface Now That Records, Policy Lists are Being Disclosed

SEATTLE--(BUSINESS WIRE)--June 29, 2000--Washington State Insurance Commissioner Deborah Senn says her office is pursuing two additional Holocaust survivor insurance claims that have surfaced in the few weeks since she began posting European insurer records on her web site (www.insurance.wa.gov).

"This is proof of what we've been saying for the past three years," Commissioner Senn said. "The pursuit of justice
requires these companies to come clean and post their records and let Holocaust families around the world look at the names themselves."

Commissioner Senn said she would discuss the newest claimants on Thursday night at an annual Seattle dinner honoring Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish diplomat who repeatedly countermanded Nazi extermination efforts, saving thousands of Hungarian Jews and other refugees. Wallenberg disappeared in 1945 and has been honored since as an example of what one righteous individual can do in evil circumstances.

"It is fitting to have good news like this to report on the day we remember one of the most courageous heroes to emerge during this terrible period in history," Commissioner Senn said. "In remembering Raoul Wallenberg, we simply cannot turn our back on the opportunity to reverse a half-century of injustice."

Commissioner Senn said the two newest claims are still in preliminary settlement stages and that the families would not be identified until later. She said her staff is working with the insurance carriers involved to solidify the claim and ease the claims process.

-- One of the claims involves a list of Dutch insurance policyholders posted on the Washington state site several months ago.

Commissioner Senn said at least six names on the Dutch list are now believed to be linked to the same Seattle family.

-- The second new Washington claim was linked to another policyholder list on the Washington site. That list came from a British company that sold policies in Poland prior to World War II. Commissioner Senn said her office had been contacted by the family of a Holocaust victim whose name appeared on that list.

"Washington is a relatively small state and we have only posted a tiny fraction of the policyholder records that we believe to be available worldwide," Commissioner Senn said. "Yet if these two lists of several hundred names apiece have already accounted for seven claims, how many more must lurk in the records of the European insurers?"

Two months ago, Commissioner Senn's office helped with the state's first Holocaust insurance claim settlement. That came after her staff found company documents verifying coverage that the Italian carrier Generali had denied for 50 years. Faced with its own documents, the company reversed itself and offered a settlement, which the Seattle claimant accepted.

In addition, Washington's Holocaust Survivors' Assistance Office four months ago has now submitted nearly 270 claims from state residents to the International Commission on Holocaust Era Insurance Claims (ICHEIC).

"Resolving these first few claims has underscored what we have been saying for years," Commissioner Senn said. "The European insurance carriers who sold this coverage must finally open their records and publish the names of their policyholders. Only then will we know the magnitude of the injustice."

NOTE: For more information about Holocaust claims, the claims-filing process, the Holocaust-insurance investigation launched by the National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC), and the background of the International Commission, please check Commissioner Senn's web page at http://www.insurance.wa.gov. Survivors, families or heirs with questions about the Holocaust Insurance Claims effort may contact the Washington State Holocaust Survivor Assistance Office toll-free at 1-888/606-9622, or at 360/664-3860 or 360/664-3790.

The Wallenberg dinner will be held this evening, June 29, beginning at Seattle's Nordic Heritage Museum, 3014 NW 67th. Featured speaker is Dr. Stephen Feinestein, director of the Center for Holocaust & Genocide Studies at the University of Minnesota.