

International Coordination Forum for the Restitution of Holocaust (Shoah) Era Assets:

Forum Declaration

Jerusalem, June 9, 2016

Seventy years after the end of the Holocaust (Shoah) in which six million Jews - seventy-five percent of the Jewish population of Europe - were murdered, most private and communal immovable and movable property illegitimately seized from Jews has not been returned to its rightful owners, their heirs, or to the Jewish people at large. Many Holocaust survivors live in poverty and without adequate social care.

We are witnessing today an unprecedented growth of antisemitism, Holocaust denial, racism and xenophobia in Europe, while the international community is not doing enough to address the legacy of the Holocaust and the issue of restitution of, or compensation for, confiscated goods and property from the Holocaust era and its aftermath.

Despite firm positions taken by the European Parliament and related commitments taken by individual states, the restitution and compensation regarding Jewish property in several European countries continues to proceed very slowly or not at all, while the social welfare needs of aging Holocaust survivors increase rapidly and become even more urgent.

In this context, and upon the invitation of the Director General of the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs in collaboration with the Israel Ministry for Social Equality, Special Envoys and Special Representatives for Holocaust Related Issues from various countries as well as representatives of the World Jewish Restitution Organization, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, and the European Shoah Legacy Institute (ESLI) participated in an International Coordination Forum for the Restitution of, or compensation for, Holocaust Era Assets. The Forum was held in Jerusalem on June 8-9, 2016 in the presence of diplomatic representatives from the EU, European Union countries, the United States and others.

The participants reiterated their political commitment to the following international resolutions and declarations that call for the restitution of, or compensation for, immovable property, art, Judaica and other cultural assets looted during the Holocaust era and its aftermath; the provision of adequate and immediate social welfare support for Holocaust survivors, the demarcation, protection and preservation of Jewish cemeteries, mass graves and other burial sites, and the promotion of Holocaust education, research and remembrance:

- European Parliament resolutions (Resolution on the Return of Plundered Property to Jewish Communities, December 1995; Resolution on the Restitution of the Possessions of Holocaust Victims, July 1998; Resolution and Report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Internal Market, December 2003);
- The Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-looted Art (December 1998) and the Vilnius Forum Declaration (October 2000);
- The Terezin Declaration of the Holocaust Era Assets Conference endorsed by 47 countries in Prague (June 2009) and the related Guidelines and Best Practices on Property Restitution and Compensation endorsed by 43 countries (June 2010);

- The Concluding Statement of the Immovable Property Review Conference in Prague (November 2012);
- The Concluding Statement of the International Conference on Welfare for Holocaust Survivors in Prague (May 2015).

The participants also:

- Commended as a first step in this regard the recent appointment of the European Commission Special Coordinator for Combating Antisemitism and welcomed the commitment of the European Commission to combat antisemitism and Holocaust denial;
- Commended the recent positive developments on the restitution of property in Serbia, Romania, and Latvia and encouraged these states and others to continue to make progress on restitution;
- Took note of the importance of addressing relevant concerns in the European Commission, the European Parliament and national parliaments;
- Took note of the desire to promote closer cooperation and association of ESLI with the relevant institutions of the European Union, in order to coordinate and promote the implementation of the Terezin Declaration, in accordance with the Joint Declaration by the European Commission and the Czech Republic Presidency of the European Council in Prague on June 29, 2009.

Considering the urgency of the matter, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to intensify efforts on the international and national levels with the aim:

1. To promote the legacy of the Holocaust (Shoah), and to promote the restitution and compensation of immovable property, art, Judaica and other cultural assets looted during the Holocaust era and its aftermath within the European Union institutions;
2. To convene an international conference on restorative justice and Holocaust era asset restitution in Brussels, organized by ESLI in cooperation with other stakeholders and partners;
3. To intensify the sharing of best practices and the exchange of information with the engagement of ESLI, individual states and related organizations, on the basis of the Guidelines and Best Practices on Property Restitution and Compensation seized during the Holocaust Era;
4. To encourage all 47 states that endorsed the Terezin Declaration to appoint Special Envoys for Holocaust Related Issues, including restorative justice and restitution;
5. To further encourage, assist and facilitate individual states to resolve, according to the Terezin Declaration principles, the restitution and compensation of looted property and to address the growing social welfare needs of Holocaust survivors.