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Concluding statement, Washington Conference  
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It has been a great honor for me and for the State Department to have co-hosted the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets. It is a particular privilege to have had as our partner the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, which is doing so much to ensure that the memory and the lessons of the Holocaust endure for future generations.

A year ago, at the London Nazi Gold Conference, we established a goal to complete by the end of this century the unfinished business of the middle of the century: the completion of the historical record on Holocaust-era assets and the provision of some measure of justice -- however belated -- to the victims and survivors of that unparalleled tragedy. Now with the conclusion of this conference approaching, we have made great strides toward achieving that historic goal.

As a result of the inspiring spirit of dedication, openness, seriousness of purpose, cooperation, and commitment you -- the 57 delegations, 44 countries, 13 NGOs, and scores of presenters -- have demonstrated as we have come together to shed new light on the long-hidden and uninvestigated issue of Holocaust-era assets, we can genuinely call the Washington Conference a great success. Indeed, we have surpassed our highest expectations and together accomplished more over the past several days than any of us could have possibly imagined when we began our preparations many months ago or even when we began these proceedings this week.

To all those who have participated and contributed, I offer my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation. Most of all, I want offer my thanks to Judge Abner Mikva, whose guiding hand has been critical to the success of this Conference. I also want to commend the Conference Director, J.D. Bindenagel, and our entire team for bringing such a complex undertaking to life and helping ensure its success.

While we must acknowledge our failure to address these issues earlier, we must also acknowledge the work of individuals and organizations who heard the pleas, who understood that justice must be completed, and who in the face of apathy worked so hard to uncover the truth and to come to the aid of survivors and their families. You refused to let the world forever turn its back to the truth,

and to you we owe our enduring appreciation.

Building on those efforts, both governments and NGOs have achieved remarkable progress, particularly in our efforts to shape principles and processes that can guide our efforts to complete the historical record and to seek justice. I would like to briefly address some of those important achievements and focus on our remaining challenges.

First, we can be encouraged that our efforts last year at the London Conference continue to motivate countries to contribute to the Nazi Persecutee Relief Fund. Pledges to the fund -- augmented by Spain at this conference -- which will be used to assist the neediest survivors of the Holocaust, now total \$60 million. We also appreciate Slovenia joining Croatia in pledging their share.

Second, the issue of Holocaust-era insurance claims was one of the more complex and difficult challenges facing this conference. This week's presentations systematically walked us through the historical record of Nazi confiscation. They painted a vivid picture of the well-intended but inadequate compensation efforts after the war, and they updated us on recent actions by insurance regulators and companies to address these issues.

I am pleased that so many delegations have supported the International Commission as the best mechanism for adjudicating claims. The U.S. Government strongly supported the creation of the commission and will work intensively with it. The commission brings together the key actors on both sides of the Atlantic, and we firmly believe that it represents the most appropriate mechanism for promptly resolving unpaid insurance claims from the Holocaust era in a swift, just, and cooperative manner. We urge other companies to join this process.

The commission will help us avoid the trans-Atlantic tensions that at times have been apparent on other Holocaust-era issues. In addition, the commission will seek to expedite a fair settlement of heirless claims so that those funds can be used to urgently help the aging survivors in need.

Resolution of the insurance issue is also being pursued on three separate tracks: through the courts, through legislation, and through regulation. It is our hope that the credibility and effectiveness of the commission's work will convince all the actors pursuing resolution of this issue, including those pursuing litigation, to merge with the IC process as the best means for quickly and equitably resolving these claims.

Third, art, without a doubt, represents the most complex set of issues we have faced at this conference. Yet I am pleased to note that we have achieved a breakthrough far exceeding our most ambitious expectations. As Philippe de Montebello told us, "The genie is out of the bottle." The art world will never be the same in the way it deals with Nazi-confiscated art. From now on, the sale, purchase, exchange, and display of art from this period will be addressed with greater sensitivity and a higher international standard of responsibility. This is a major achievement which will reverberate through our museums, galleries, auction houses, and in the homes

and hearts of those families who may now have the chance to have returned what is rightfully theirs. This will also lead to the removal of uncertainty in the world art market and facilitate commercial and cultural exchange.

We have reached a remarkable degree of consensus on a set of substantive principles, which while not legally binding represent a moral commitment among nations which all in the art world will have to take into account. These principles are the result of intensive consultations with art experts, cultural institutions, and countries before and during the conference. We have listened and incorporated many of your suggestions in order to achieve consensus, and we are very pleased by the explicit support given by so many countries directly to the principles. These principles encourage research into the provenance and identification of art, they call for these findings to be publicized and for the establishment of a central digital registry which will link all Holocaust-era art-loss data bases, and they encourage alternative dispute-resolution strategies.

I am pleased to note that several countries have already taken courageous steps to address these issues. For example, Austria, Switzerland, and the Netherlands are researching the provenance of works in their national collections; the French Government has established a web site to display a portion of the some 2,000 pieces of art restituted after the war still unclaimed; and Austria has passed a law to allow restitution notwithstanding such legal obstacles as the statute of limitations. In addition, we are particularly pleased by the announcement of the Russian delegation that they will actively cooperate in resolving outstanding issues related to Holocaust-era art. The actions of these nations could provide useful models for other countries. Indeed, the Austrian law is a model for all countries to follow.

To be sure, it is not enough to identify art that was stolen. We must also establish a system to resolve issues of ownership and compensation. In that spirit, I urge each national delegation to commit itself to the task of faithfully implementing these principles.

Fourth, this conference is the first time that international attention has been focused so sharply -- with genuine debate -- on the issue of communal property restitution. It was an important opportunity to review both the progress that has been made and the very real obstacles that remain. We also were reminded that restitution is essential to the revitalization of religious and other pluralistic communities as well as to democratic institutions and the rule of law.

We have worked to encourage the new democracies of the region to provide restitution and/or compensation for property wrongfully confiscated -- and to do so in an equitable, transparent, non-discriminatory, and expeditious manner. While most countries in the region recognize their obligation to return confiscated property, there remains in some countries a lukewarm commitment to completing quickly the work at hand.

There is a compelling reason to finish this task as urgently as possible. I have met with Holocaust survivor communities throughout central and eastern Europe. Cut off from freedom, their relatives, and the compensation that was available to survivors in the West,

many of these elderly survivors are living out their remaining years in poverty and fear. They are truly the double victims of the 20th century -- first of the Nazi Holocaust and then more than 4 decades of communist repression. They deserve to see the return of their communal properties within their lifetimes so their communities can rebuild their shattered existence.

Precisely because restitution of communal property is a difficult process, it requires the urgent, cooperative, and steadfast support of both governments and non-governmental organizations.

We certainly recognize that there are many practical difficulties in resolving these issues, and that circumstances vary among countries. That is why the U.S. has proposed some general principles to address the difficulties faced by all communities. We are urging governments to return secular as well as religious communal properties, to take necessary steps to ensure that restitution policies established at the national level are implemented at the regional and local levels, and to make the legal procedures for filing claims clear and straightforward. At the same time, restitution procedures must take into account the legitimate interests of the current occupants.

On the other hand, we recognize that in some countries local communities are not always able to bear the full cost of restitution. That is why we also urge the establishment of foundations where needed to help local communities organize their restitution claims as well as involve other groups in assisting local communities with research, legal counsel, and funding for rebuilding. Above all, communal properties should be returned at a much faster rate than they have been so far. This may require more resources from governments and from non-governmental organizations. Even more important, it will require renewed energy and commitment by all concerned. The U.S. Government hopes that in 1999 we can see an intensification of efforts on these issues -- and concrete progress as a result.

We were pleased to hear that Poland has expressed tentative interest in hosting a conference on communal property restitution. This is encouraging, and we would urge other countries in the region to support the idea.

Fifth, a key to success in all the areas this conference has addressed -- and in all aspects of Holocaust-era assets -- is the openness and accessibility of archives. We are concerned that in some countries, archives are still accessible on only a limited basis and others unfortunately appear destined to remain closed. The U.S. vigorously supports the archival openness declaration of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. That declaration urges that all Holocaust-relevant archives, both public and private, be made widely accessible and that all documentation bearing on the Holocaust be made available to researchers by December 31, 1999.

The work of the 17 historical commissions has been the centerpiece of an amazing outpouring of scholarship on the Holocaust. And a consensus has emerged on the need to use the Internet in making their reports and other related information available. At the planning seminar for this conference in June 1998, we agreed to establish, on the Internet, an international guide to archival sources on gold and other assets looted by the Nazis. I am pleased to report that this guide is up and running. Valuable archival information from the U.K.,

France, Croatia, and the Bank for International Settlements is linked through a central site hosted by the Holocaust Museum, and more countries are preparing their contributions.

This experience has convinced us to further expand our use of the Internet and institute what we might call a "Mega Web Site" to link the sites of all commissions, governments, and institutions. A "Mega Web Site" is fully possible using current technology. Its users will be able to share all currently available reports and documents on Holocaust-era assets. This "Mega Web Site" will become even more useful as new participants add their Internet sites and new materials are published.

As a contribution to Holocaust education, research, and remembrance, we plan to include the proceedings of this conference on the website. Although we will publish a volume of the proceedings of this conference in January 1999, we intend to keep the record open until the end of 1999 so that researchers and delegations can contribute the results of work completed subsequent to this conference - and move toward completing the historical record on the wide range of issues we have addressed this week.

I would like to take note of the fact that Greece, one of the first countries in post-war Europe to restitute property to Holocaust survivors and their heirs, has undertaken another crucial aspect of uncovering history. The Greek Government is funding the publication of a collection of Greek Foreign Ministry documents, which shed new light not only on the history of Thessaloniki, the largest Sephardic community in Europe, but also on the creation of the state of Israel. I would also like to take note of the contribution made by Belarus on developing a book on Holocaust-era assets in their country. We appreciate the spirit in which the Swiss Government has made its proposal on Internet racism and anti-semitism.

Sixth, our greatest, most solemn and enduring responsibility is to memorialize the lives of the victims by committing ourselves to educating future generations on the full dimensions of the Holocaust. That is why I am so encouraged by the groundbreaking work launched by Sweden to create the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research, which has forged the first intergovernmental effort to promote Holocaust education. The U.S. wants to urge the representatives of each country present here to endorse the Task Force declaration on Holocaust education and its call to "undertake with renewed vigor and attention Holocaust education, remembrance and research, with a special focus on our own countries' histories." We are also pleased by the interest on the part of France and the Netherlands to join the task force, which will meet later today to discuss, among other things, how to reach out to include more countries in its work. The U.S. strongly supports the proposal by Sweden to host a conference on Holocaust Education and Remembrance in late 1999 or early 2000.

The Washington Conference comes to a close today, but the process of resolving the outstanding issues of Holocaust-era assets must not. We must use the historical record established, the information shared, and the consensus reached in the past 3 days to galvanize our efforts in all areas. As a result of our work this week, we can point to principles in some cases, processes in others, and initiatives in still others that will continue to focus our attention and accelerate our progress toward justice. A number of countries have come

forward to suggest follow-up efforts by the international community on many of the issues we have discussed here, and these should be seriously considered.

Let me close with a proposed roadmap for fulfilling the call of the London Conference -- and now the Washington Conference as well -- to complete our work for justice before the end of this millennium.

- On insurance, we look to the International Commission to fulfill its mandate and reach a swift and just solution. We recognize the need to merge the IC process with litigation, and the U.S. will support any such efforts.
- On art, the consensus achieved on principles should be translated into action, databases should be linked, and provenance research expedited -- all leading to the resolution of claims and the restoration of confidence in the world art market.
- On communal property, we urge the governments to embrace the principles we have proposed and make substantial progress in 1999. I encourage the countries in the region to support the proposal for a follow-up conference to focus further attention on this issue.
- On archives, we urge all the delegations to implement the declaration on opening all public and private archives pertaining to the Holocaust, including assets, by the end of next year.
- On Holocaust education and remembrance, we encourage countries to strengthen their efforts and support the International Task Force and the Stockholm Conference.

It is also important to mention briefly two related issues that were not on the conference agenda:

- Private property restitution was omitted from the conference agenda because of the complexities of the issue, not to indicate that it was unimportant. Countries in the family of democracies should move swiftly to conclusively address the unjust confiscations that took place during the war and after.
- The landmark settlement by the Swiss banks must be finalized, and the distribution called for in the settlement should be made swiftly so that it can benefit needy Holocaust survivors.

As representatives of our nations and as representatives of humanity, we must never forget that the commitment and resolve we are demonstrating today comes more than 50 years late. Each and every one of us has a solemn and awesome responsibility to see that some small measure of justice for the victims of the Holocaust can be achieved. By doing so, we will rededicate ourselves not only to the work at hand, but also to ensuring that the millions of individual victims will not be forgotten and indeed will guide our efforts in the

weeks and months to come.

We appreciate the statements by the Ukrainian and Russian delegations on non-Jewish survivors of the concentration camps and their needs as aging survivors. This merits our serious consideration. As Elie Wiesel has said, "All Jews were victims, but not all victims were Jews." To those who perished in the gas chambers; to those who lost families, homes, property, even their communities and homelands; to the double victims who suffered not only the unimaginable horror of the Holocaust but also 40 years of communist repression; to the survivors, whose cries for justice and restitution were ignored; to the victims' families, to their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren whose pain and sense of loss will never disappear -- it is to their individual memories that we must continue to commit ourselves.

As we pen the final chapter in the unfinished business of the 20th century, we ask that each delegate remember that our efforts at this conference, in some small way, are helping restore that sense of individual dignity and personal humanity for those who amazingly survived and those who tragically perished. May that solemn goal guide us as we tackle the great challenges that lie ahead.

Thank you very much.

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