

The Rt. Hon. Boris Johnson MP  
Foreign Secretary  
Foreign and Commonwealth office  
King Charles Street  
London  
SW1A 2AH

29 September 2016

Dear Foreign Secretary,

On behalf of the Board of Deputies of British Jews and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO), we write to request that the British Government urge countries in Central and Eastern Europe to fulfill their responsibility to ageing Holocaust survivors and their families whose property was unjustly taken during the Holocaust and its aftermath.

Over seventy years after the Holocaust, many survivors and their families continue to wait for a small measure of justice for the expropriation of their property. Restitution would provide survivors in Britain and abroad with the material support they need to live their remaining days with the dignity they deserve. Furthermore, restitution also enables Jewish communities devastated by the Holocaust to sustain and revitalise themselves.

The United Kingdom has long played a leadership role in pursuing justice for Holocaust survivors.

The United Kingdom and forty-six other countries endorsed the Terezin Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related Issues on 30 June 2009, affirming the importance of restitution of private property, as well as Jewish communal and heirless property. This international consensus was furthered on 9 June 2010 when the United Kingdom joined forty-two other countries to approve Guidelines and Best Practices for the restitution of immovable Holocaust-era property, and again in November 2012 when the United Kingdom, thirty-eight other countries, the European Commission, and the World Jewish Restitution Organization convened at the Immoveable Property Review Conference held by the European Shoah Legacy Institute.

Britain's strong cross-party support for justice for Holocaust survivors and their families was most recently expressed through eloquent speeches by Members of the House of Lords during a debate on 27 February 2014, as well as letters from 50 parliamentarians to then-Foreign Secretary William Hague and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk respectively on 24 February 2014.

We commend the work of Sir Eric Pickles, Special Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues, and British Ambassadors in raising this issue with Poland and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe. We also note with pleasure the close working relationship that both of our organisations have developed with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in pursuit of our common aims.

Despite the international consensus on restitution, many countries have not passed legislation to ensure the return of private properties to their rightful owners or communal properties to their remaining Jewish communities. In particular, Poland, home to approximately 3,300,000 Jewish people before the Holocaust, is the only major post-Communist country without a national programme for the restitution of private property.

With the advancing age and increasing needs of Holocaust survivors in mind, we ask that the Government redouble its advocacy on this issue with Poland and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Sincerely,



Gillian Merron  
Chief Executive  
Board of Deputies



Gideon Taylor  
Chair of Operations  
World Jewish Restitution Organization