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July 8, 2003

Mr. Israel Singer, President
Mr. Julius Berman, Chairman
Claims Conference
15 East 26 Street
New York, NY 10010

Dear Messr. Singer and Berman:

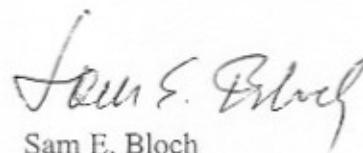
In anticipation of the forthcoming plenary session of the Board of Directors of the Claims Conference, I feel the necessity, as a Holocaust survivor and life-long activist in the cause of Remembrance, since the days of Bergen Belsen in the aftermath of liberation, to add my tribute to the Claims Conference, its past and present leaders, for the pivotal role they have played in providing assistance to our fellow survivors in so many ways and so many places throughout the world, and in supporting so many Holocaust related projects of remembrance and commemoration.

The Claims Conference rightfully understood that its efforts for restitution were not only a matter of material compensation to survivors for their suffering and losses, but a major historic endeavor of a struggle for truth, memory, justice and morality. Faced with the imperative of both caring for the needs of survivors and ensuring that the Claims Conference has done faithfully both, with notable success for which it rightfully deserves full recognition and appreciation. The task is not yet fully accomplished. Much more will have to be done. Our slogan "Remember" should not remain an empty phrase but a rallying call for all concerned with the welfare of our survivors to continue caring for their needs as well as the support for educational remembrance projects, documentation, and memorial institutions.

I sincerely hope that the Claims Conference will continue its efforts in both areas with profound dedication so that the memory and legacy of the Holocaust will remain with the world around us for generations to come.

A copy of my article in the Jewish Week is attached.

Sincerely yours,



Sam E. Bloch

cc: Gideon Taylor

OPINION

Defending The Claims Conference

Sam E. Bloch

Special To The Jewish Week

I am a survivor of the Holocaust. My fellow survivors and I are the witnesses who emerged from Nazi hell with a special message, with a sacred legacy of remembrance and justified claims of restitution.

It is crucially important that Holocaust restitution funds and other resources within the Jewish community are used to assist my fellow survivors who need social services they cannot afford. These are brave men and women who are elderly now and need assistance. They may not be able to meet the costs of their utilities. The scars left by the past affects their health and their entire existence. Funds from Holocaust restitution and Jewish organizations must be used to help them live out their days with a measure of dignity.

The situation of the needy survivors has only recently begun to come to the attention of many in the wider Jewish community, but the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany has played a pivotal role for a decade in providing such assistance to survivors. Its funds for such assistance derive primarily from the Claims Conference's recovery of unclaimed Jewish property in the former East Germany.

The Claims Conference fought to recover this property at the same time it ensured the right of heirs to stolen Jewish property to file claims for it. If the Claims Conference had not fought to recover this property, the land would have reverted to the state or to postwar non-Jewish owners, a simply unthinkable outcome.

The Claims Conference has used most of the proceeds it has derived from the sale of or compensation for that German Jewish property to pioneer specialized care for Holocaust survivors around the world. The needs are great and diverse, with assistance in more than 30 countries including home care, medical care and equipment, food packages and hot meals, winter clothing, rent payments, nursing beds and emergency cash grants.

The Claims Conference has established Holocaust Survivor Assistance programs in more than 50 communities in the United States and has helped reinvent care for the elderly in Israel. And although the funds derive from German Jewish property, they are used to care for survivors regardless of their country of origin or current residence.

The conditions and the needs of Holocaust survivors, who have endured so much hardship in their lives, should be a permanent concern to the entire Jewish community and to all Jewish federations, not only to the Claims Conference.

But the Claims Conference has also come under criticism of late for its allocations that support Shoah education, research and documentation. Some say all funding should go to the survivors themselves. Faced with the imperatives of both caring for elderly survivors and ensuring that the lessons of the Shoah are preserved for generations to come, the Claims



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Conference has done both. It has used a small portion of the funds from the recovery of German Jewish property to fulfill an obligation to preserve the memory of those who perished.

Survivors like myself want the world to know what happened. We who walked away from the ashes of Nazi Europe knew we had the responsibility of being the voice of those who did not survive. In recent years, as we have become fewer in number, many have acted on that responsibility, trying to tell the world our story while we still can.

It is not enough to repeatedly sound the slogan "Remember." And neither is it the survivors who need to be told to remember. When we sound this command so loudly, it should be directed primarily to the

world around us, to those who were not in Treblinka. And this is where grants for education, research and documentation are vitally important. Restitution funds must also be used for this purpose.

Claims Conference allocations in this area are used for Shoah educational programs and teaching materials, and efforts to document, archive and preserve irreplaceable documents, pictures, artifacts and firsthand survivor accounts of the Holocaust. The funds come from the assets of those who perished. Using a small portion to preserve their memory is fully justified. It is indeed gratifying.

These Claims Conference grants for education and documentation projects amount to 20 percent of allocations but just 1 to 2 percent of the entire Claims Conference budget. The vast majority of all Claims Conference funds go to direct compensation payments to survivors. Thus, 1 to 2 percent of all restitution and compensation funds distributed by the Claims Conference are used to preserve the memory of those who perished — to remember how they lived and how they died, and the world that was destroyed.

These efforts must be continued in order that the legacy of the Holocaust may remain with the world long after the survivors — and the generation that learned from the survivors — are gone.

It is my firm belief that any survivor who needs social service assistance should receive it. Those who emerged from the camps, ghettos, forests and hiding places already have endured more than any human being should. In their last years, Holocaust survivors are entitled to care and comfort, and it is the responsibility of the Jewish community to supplement the efforts already being made in this area with restitution funds.

But restitution funds have many worthy uses, among them ensuring that the names of the Six Million are recorded for all time. Those who perished wished to be remembered. We must honor their last wish. □

Sam E. Bloch is the senior vice president of The American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and the president of the World Federation of Bergen-Belsen Survivors.