

Rabbi Menachem Hacohen

ב"ה, י' אייר תשס"ג
Jerusalem, 5 May 2003

To: Rabbi Dr. Israel Singer President
Rabbi Julius Berman Chairman
Mr. Gideon Taylor Executive Vice President
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, Inc.
15 East 26th Street, Rm. 906
New York, NY 10010

Fax: 001-212-679-2126

Dear Sirs,

I would like to address a matter that will be discussed at the upcoming board meeting of the Claims Conference: Claims Conference allocations for Holocaust education, commemoration and research.

The funds with which the Claims Conference has been entrusted are not simply funds; this money represents the property of Holocaust victims and, as such, a tremendous responsibility is placed on the Claims Conference when determining the allocation of these funds.

Here we must remember and remind ourselves constantly that these funds come attached with a will, these funds come attached with the last instructions of their owners who perished – to remember and never forget!

We are charged with doing all that can be done so that the memory of the darkest event in human history will be remembered and not blotted out; that the memory of the victims, the communities and their cultural and spiritual world will be remembered for eternity; and through the living memory of this horrible chapter in history, we will prevent its reoccurrence.

This last will has been a guiding light to Holocaust survivors, "brands plucked out of the fire", who saw their obligation to serve as living witnesses to the greatest human tragedy, and to transmit the story and its lessons to the next generation.

Along with this moral will, the Claims Conference took upon itself – and rightly so – to care for the welfare of Holocaust survivors, particularly those in need. The Claims Conference chose to balance these two weighty tasks by apportioning the majority of the funds (80%) for the welfare of the survivors, and the remainder for support of Holocaust commemoration and education of future generations.

Recently there have been calls for change, even to the extent of harming the funds intended for Holocaust remembrance.

I agonize at the sound of these voices.

Is it possible that we ourselves will betray the responsibility entrusted to us in the will that is placed before us?

Is it possible that we will harm the memory of the Shoah, the memory of the victims and their legacy, and Holocaust education?

Is this possible, what is more, in these times when we perceive a rise in antisemitism, when we are witness to reoccurring instances of Holocaust denial or attempts to minimize the Holocaust, turning it into just another event in human history?


As it should be, the majority of funds are allocated for the welfare of the survivors, however this should not adversely affect the current level of funding for preserving the memory of the Shoah. Especially in these times, we should strengthen the institutions dedicated to Holocaust remembrance, particularly those operating in the Jewish State and representing a world center for Holocaust commemoration.

In my opinion, a reexamination of the Claims Conference's established procedure for allocations should lead to an increase in funds for the purposes of Holocaust remembrance. Only thus will we faithfully fulfill our obligation. Only thus will be able to carry out the responsibility and will prescribed by the victims, ד"ק.

I will conclude with the words of David Gerber, one of the Jews who devoted his last efforts in 1942 to saving the Ringelblum archive. His words, I believe, speak for themselves:

"It is not for thanks that I give my life and my strength. I would love to see the moment in which the great treasure will be dug up and scream to the world proclaiming the truth. So the world may know all....But no, we shall certainly never live to see it, and therefore do I write my last will. May the treasure fall into good hands, may it last into better times, may it alarm and alert the world to what happened....it is our collective wish that after the publication a special place be awarded this material in....Eretz Israel, so we can repose quietly and freely....May history be our witness."

Sincerely yours,


Rabbi Menahem Hacohen