



ההסתדרות הציונית העולמית
World Zionist Organization

הסוכנות היהודית לארץ ישראל
The Jewish Agency for Israel



Shai Hermesh, Treasurer

שי הרמש, נגב

May 27, 2003

To
Rabbi Dr. Israel Singer, President
Mr. Julius Berman, Chairman
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany
New York

Dear Friends,

I have followed with great interest the ongoing debate concerning the Claims Conference's current policy of allocating 20% of restitutions funds for Holocaust education and research. In my opinion, this policy is a true expression of the core mandate of the Claims Conference: the provision of compensation for injuries to Jewish victims of Nazi persecution, restitution for Jewish property confiscated or destroyed by the Nazis, and aid in both the physical rehabilitation of Jewish victims and in the restoration of Jewish communities and institutions devastated in the Holocaust.

As an Israeli, home to the largest group of Holocaust survivors in the world, I fully support the use of restitution funds in providing basic welfare assistance for the increasingly aging survivor population. During my tenure as head of a regional council in the Negev, I was able to view first hand the difficult challenges facing elderly Holocaust survivors and the important contribution of restitution funds in helping them meet these challenges. We must remain committed to helping these individual victims live out their lives in dignity.

As we care for the individual survivors of the Holocaust, we must also invest in the collective survival of those communities whose educational, cultural and institutional base were dealt a fatal blow by Nazism and decades of totalitarian regimes. The Claims Conference is entrusted with providing assistance for the restoration of Jewish communities and institutions. This incredibly rich cultural and spiritual world of European Jewry, a world which sustained Jewish vitality for centuries, was nearly destroyed during the war, and the communities and institutions which survived the way have yet to recover.

Our tradition teaches us that education is at the core of Jewish community, and hence the restoration of community rests on the vitality of the education it can provide. Today, as we look at Jewish communities in Eastern Europe, the former FSU and at Russian speaking Jews around the world, we see clearly the lack of Jewish literacy and the fragile foundation of Jewish identity. I am convinced that without an investment in Jewish education, which will teach these young people about the Holocaust and give them the tools to explore their Jewish identity in the modern world, we will be unable to restore Jewish communities and institutions. Jewish education is the key to



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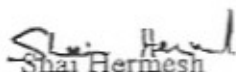
שי הרמש, מזכר

developing the leadership of such communities and institutions so that they will know from whence they have come, and will be able to articulate whither they are going.

I have been personally involved in the absorption of new immigrants into Israel society over the last decade. Here too, I have learned first hand of the ongoing need to provide basic knowledge of the Holocaust and to strengthen the anchors of Jewish identity and identification. These Jews, especially the younger ones, are for the most part tragically unaware of the richness of their own heritage. They lack the basic Jewish cultural capital which will enable them not only to survive as Jews, but to participate in the cultural renaissance of our people, in Israel and around the world.

I call upon my fellow board members to continue their commitment to the core message of the Claims Conference, and to maintain an allocation of not less than 20% of restitution funds for the restoration and revitalization of our nearly lost cultural heritage through education, research and documentation.

Sincerely,


Shai Hermesh

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