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Le Président

Dr. Israel Singer, President
Mr. Julius Berman, Chairman
Mr. Gideon Taylor, Executive Vice President
Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany

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Dear Friends,

Recently, some doubts have been raised regarding both the legitimacy and the extent of the support brought by the Claims Conference to the fields of education, research and documentation.

It is clear for me of course that the primary requirement in the distribution of the funds is to provide proper help for the needy survivors. But, although this requirement is primary, it is not exclusive.

In fact, for us survivors, it should be all but evident that our very survival makes us obligated to those who did not survive.

The first such obligation is that of remembrance. We are the living "Yad Vashem", the living recollection of the Jews wiped out in the Shoah. We have to tirelessly remember and remind everyone of their humiliation, their suffering, their terror, their despair and above all their death.

Yet, to only hold in our mind the time of their adversity would be to mutilate their very being. All the more that the account of their death is that of their life, and the life of their communities, which it is of the essence to pass down to new generations. We can never sufficiently express our debt to them.

In the shtetl, as in the cities of Eastern-Europe, the Jews have for centuries nurtured a world of intelligence, of sensitivity, of faith, of dialogue – at times tumultuous – with Heaven, of faithfulness to tradition but also sometimes of rebellion against it. But the most characteristic trait of these Jews was their passion for learning. As said by Abraham Heschel : The Jews have made of the Torah the great love of their life. The texts they dealt with were in Hebrew or Aramaic, but their commentary was in Yiddish. It is them who have inspired the "Yiddishkeit", this particular way of being a Jew and being human.

The religious, spiritual and also political life, permeated with hope for Zion and anticipation for the Messiah, has turned these communities into the incandescent seat of Judaism. The sparks that shot out of it illuminated all the communities of the Diaspora and ensured their constant revitalization.

We should equally mention that, off the shores of the Mediterranean, it is Ladino that bore the history, the rich thought as well as the nostalgia of the Spanish Jews who fled the Inquisition.

Whatever their origin, the Jews of the Shoah have left us their history but, at the same time, they have entrusted us with a treasure, a precious heritage, the transmission of which is our duty. As have been said "we are responsible for the future of this past" and we are "the roots of the future" of our people.


Thus, even more than the obligation of remembrance, it is the obligation of transmitting this message to our children and to our children's children that constitutes our fundamental mission. We cannot bring back the dead other than in our minds and in our hearts, but we can and we have to make sure that the heritage they have bequeathed us lives on. For us, this memory is not just a matter of history but also of identity.

In that respect, it is through the Jewish way of life, Jewish education, Jewish studies and particularly the study of the Hebrew language, that the future of this culture will be safe. It is both the responsibility and the privilege of the Claims, and it will also prove to be its sign of glory, to substantially contribute to the perpetuity of the Message of those who have been ignominiously snatched from us.

More than ever, we share the words of Edmond Fleg :

*"I am a Jew because I wish that after my time,
Judaism will shine ~~more~~ brighter than within me".* *

Very sincerely yours,



Professor Ady STEG

* Je suis Juif parce que je veux qu'après moi
le Judaïsme vive plus vivant qu'en moi-même