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WASHINGTON (AP) -- Eighty-two senators have joined the Clinton administration in urging Germany to pay pensions to long-neglected Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe, saying it's unfair to ignore them while compensating former Nazi soldiers.

"The German government cannot continue to turn its back on these people," Sen. Christopher Dodd, leader of the effort, said Wednesday. "The German government must not deny them this right (of restitution) while rewarding those who may have committed heinous crimes."

Germany has paid more than \$54 billion to Western survivors of the Nazi regime, but those living in the former Soviet bloc countries were unable to apply for compensation during the Cold War. Estimates of the number of Holocaust survivors in Eastern Europe range from 15,000 to 40,000.

Germany provides "war victim" pensions to more than 3,000 veterans of Nazi military forces or their dependents living in the United States, the senators noted, and more than 1 million in Germany, including a reported 50,000 suspected war criminals.

The senators' plea on behalf of the "double victims" of World War II was made in a letter sent Aug. 1 to German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. It will be featured in ads in U.S. and international newspapers to apply pressure ahead of a German-Jewish negotiating session next week in Bonn.

Dodd, D-Conn., whose father, the late Sen. Thomas Dodd, was a leading prosecutor at the 1946 Nuremberg war crimes trials of Nazi leaders, and Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, circulated the letter.

"We find it distressing that your government has refused to provide any meaningful compensation to this forgotten group of Holocaust survivors," the letter says. "We hope you will address this matter with the utmost speed so these remaining survivors of mankind's darkest hours are able to live out their final years with some measure of comfort and dignity."

The American Jewish Committee, among the groups negotiating with Germany, is sponsoring the newspaper and magazine ads.

"The German government has been stonewalling on this for years as these Holocaust survivors get older and die," Arthur Berger of the American Jewish Committee in New York said Wednesday in an interview.

"This is too important and too moral an issue to ignore. Germany can't fully put World War II behind it until the government addresses this."

In the case of Latvia, for example, Berger said 120 Holocaust survivors were counted just a couple of years ago, but today there are 82.

In the past few years, the German government has been working with former communist states to set up foundations to provide one-time lump payments of up to several hundred dollars to

Holocaust survivors, but Jewish groups and the U.S. government complain that's inadequate.

Stuart Eizenstat, the undersecretary of state who this spring issued a critical U.S. report on the Swiss handling of looted Nazi gold during the war, recommended that any latter-day restitution funds first consider the "double victims" of the Holocaust living in Eastern Europe.