

AJCOMMITTEE NEWS

Founded in 1906, the American Jewish Committee seeks to protect the rights of Jews throughout the world; combats anti-Semitism and bigotry; works for the security of Israel; enhances human rights, democratic pluralism and intergroup understanding; and promotes the creative vitality of the Jewish people.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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AJCOMMITTEE APPLAUDS GERMAN GOVERNMENT ANNOUNCEMENT TO PROVIDE COMPENSATION FOR HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS IN EASTERN EUROPE AND FORMER SOVIET UNION

NEW YORK, Jan. 12, 1998....The American Jewish Committee today issued the following statement regarding the German government's announcement to provide 200 million DM, approximately \$120 million, to a new Holocaust fund set up to compensate survivors in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union:

"The American Jewish Committee applauds the decision of the German government to compensate Jewish victims of Nazi persecution living in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The issue at hand has always been not only Germany's financial obligation to help these individuals, many of them destitute and in poor health, but Germany's moral obligation to them. These long-deserving and too-long forgotten 'double victims' of Nazism and Communism may now have the opportunity, as a result of this welcome German decision, to live out their final years with some measure of dignity and comfort.

"We applaud the efforts of The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (of which the AJC is a founding member) and other concerned organizations and individuals that have been tireless in their commitment to seek justice for these survivors. It has been clear from the outset that we could not move forward in our work to build a better world until these remnants of the greatest tragedy of the 20th century were addressed.

"We are hopeful that the process of compensation will begin shortly and can be accomplished in an organized and timely fashion. We pledge our support and cooperation to help move the process along in an effort to finally put this painful issue to rest."

For its part, the American Jewish Committee has long pleaded the case of these uncompensated Nazi victims. Over the years, AJC took a lead in raising the issue in private letters and numerous meetings with Chancellor Kohl, Foreign Minister Klaus Kinkel and other senior government officials. In 1995, under the direction of Rabbi Andrew Baker, AJC's Washington-based Director of European Affairs, AJC compiled a list, country by country, of individual ghetto and concentration camp survivors living in Central and Eastern Europe. That list was sent to Bonn in the hope that it would aid the German government in beginning the process of compensation. Ironically, as revelations began to surface of generous German pensions paid to Nazi Waffen SS veterans living in Eastern Europe and in Western countries,



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AJC also maintains regional offices in 32 major cities across the U.S.

including more than three thousand in the United States alone, AJC's appeal took on an added and more public dimension. It seemed unfathomable that those individuals who may well have been involved in crimes against humanity were enjoying regular benefits for their wartime service in Nazi Germany, while the victims of their atrocities were receiving nothing for their suffering.

In May 1997, frustrated at the German government's refusal to settle the issue, AJC held a news conference on Capital Hill, featuring members of Congress, leaders of Eastern European Jewish communities and a member of the German Parliament to urge reconsideration. On that same day, AJC featured an ad in The New York Times to call public attention to the injustice of denying Holocaust survivor's pensions while awarding such pensions to Waffen SS. In August 1997, AJC initiated a major campaign in the U.S. Senate to draft a letter to Chancellor Kohl urging a reversal of Germany's position on this critical issue. AJC then sponsored full-page advertisements in major newspapers and periodicals, including The New York Times and The International Herald Tribune, featuring the "open letter" bi-partisan appeal of 82 U.S. Senators (led by Christopher Dodd of Connecticut and Kay Bailey Hutchison of Texas) urging Chancellor Kohl to act "with the utmost speed."

AJC's permanent office in Berlin (which has been operating for several months but which will be officially opened and dedicated in February) has allowed the human relations agency to have an on-scene presence in its work on this issue. Eugene DuBow is the director of AJC's Berlin Office.

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