



Statement by Congressman Alcee L. Hastings

Co-Chairman

Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

"Holocaust Era Assets – After the Prague Conference"

May 25, 2010

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing today on these longstanding and time-sensitive concerns.

Roughly one year ago, virtually every country in Europe sent representatives to Prague to discuss outstanding issues relating to Holocaust-era assets -- outstanding even 65 years after the liberation of Auschwitz and the end of the war. I commend the government of the Czech Republic for hosting that conference. But I do not see the Prague conference as an end unto itself. That is why this hearing is so important -- we need to see the lofty goals espoused at that conference translated into real, and meaningful, action.

While the Prague Conference covered a lot of issues, I would like to highlight one subject in particular. A special session focused on the extremely difficult and even precarious situation of many elderly and impoverished victims of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes. Those who suffered extraordinary emotional and physical anguish during the war often suffer the lingering effects of trauma, particularly in old age. I welcome special attention that was given to the subject in Prague.

With this in mind, Mr. Chairman, I would like to draw attention briefly to a statement by Esther Topeorek Finder that has been submitted for the record. Her deeply moving remarks about the impact diseases of age have on Holocaust survivors were originally presented at the Prague conference and I commend them to everyone here. I would also note that Ms. Finder's

commitment and dedication to Holocaust survivors is eloquently described in the May 19th issue of WASHINGTON JEWISH WEEK.

Mr. Chairman, I also wanted to say just a few words about the particular problem of heirless property. And here, I want to make two points.

First, there is something terribly perverse about applying the normal rules of inheritance to the extraordinary and tragic circumstances created by the Holocaust. Last August, the NEW YORK TIMES described the situation of Michael Klepetar [pron. KLEP-e-tar]. His Great Uncle was killed during the Holocaust, along with his Great Uncle's direct heirs. The Czech Government has relied on its standard rules of inheritance to prevent Mr. Klepetar from claiming his Great Uncle's artwork because the family's direct heirs were murdered. Meanwhile, the family artwork hangs in the National Gallery in Prague. Mr. Chairman, I think that is just wrong.

Governments have, I believe, a moral responsibility to address this problem more creatively. And where property is truly, truly heirless, the proceeds of heirless properties should go to communities, in trust for survivors' needs and welfare.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I join you in welcoming Ambassador Eizenstat. Ambassador Eizenstat, thank you for your tremendous leadership on these issues.