

Honourable Guests, Ladies & Gentlemen

Firstly may I (too) welcome you all here to what I sincerely hope will be both a memorable & a productive working session.

As well as being Jt V Chairman of World Jewish Relief, I Chair the American Joint's Property Reclamation Committee & represent World Jewish relief on the Claims Conference Board..

I would like to use my opening remarks to make 4 very important points.

Firstly it is inequitable & totally unacceptable that whereas certain countries, such as our host country, the Czech Republic, have dealt with restitution in a prompt & exemplary fashion, others have still done little or nothing. In particular I have to single out Lithuania, where over the last 7 or 8 years we have been given a series of broken promises from the Lithuanian Government, but no real progress whatsoever has been made. Their latest proposals are, in my opinion, a total farce, & represent a not very subtle attempt at avoiding making any real compensation to the Lithuanian Jewish Community at all. I, & fortunately many others, will not stand idly by & let them get away with this, & I sincerely hope that this conference sends a loud & clear message to them that no longer will this be tolerated. I had hoped, after my visit there a couple of weeks ago, to be able to report some positive steps towards restitution from the Latvian Government. Regrettably this has not been forthcoming, & continuing failure in this regard will just lead Latvia to be classed in the same boat as Lithuania. And there is still Poland where, although communal restitution has, to a great extent been dealt with, no real progress has been made on the question of personal restitution.

This leads on, very neatly, to my second point. It is absolutely essential that this conference is not just another forum for discussion. In another 10 years time there will be very few survivors still with us, &, therefore, this must be the start of a concerted push to finalise the many outstanding issues. If the institute to be set up at Terezin spends all its time debating the wording of resolutions, rather than getting on & actually implementing them, it will be a waste of time, &, quite frankly, we may as well not bother. We now need actions & not just words, with support, hopefully, from all those countries participating here today, such support being of sufficient strength to convince those remaining countries that they have no option but to comply.



At the same time we have to realise that the current severe economic downturn makes it politically even more difficult for those countries who have yet to effect restitution. To ask their citizens to pay out many many millions to minority groups, when, at the same time, these citizens are seeing their amenities & benefits severely curtailed, can well be electoral suicide, & can stir up unrest. Even though these countries only have themselves to blame for delaying implementation for so long, we must work with them to find ways of achieving restitution in a more politically acceptable way, such as the transferring of existing governmental property assets, rather than the deploying of governmental funds.

Finally, I must make the point that achieving restitution is by no means the end of the task. Many communities need help in maximising the potential of the assets they get back. Often it is easier for suitably qualified outsiders to avoid internal political agendas & to see the bigger picture. Certainly our aim at JDC is to get each & every Jewish community that obtains restitution, financially self-sufficient, & our hope is that, one day, they will be able to help their fellow Jews in countries where restitution is still not a real possibility.

Thank you.