



Chair's Closing Statement

Terezín Declaration Conference

Prague and Terezín, Czech Republic
November 2-4, 2022

The International Terezín Declaration Conference was held in Prague and Terezín on November 2-4, 2022 and provided the opportunity for representatives of 38 states to come together and review countries' commitments related to Holocaust issues.

The Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs organized this Conference as one of the signature events of the Czech July – December 2022 presidency of the Council of the European Union. This was a follow-on engagement to the 2009 Prague Holocaust Era Assets Conference, held during the first Czech EU presidency, at which 47 states endorsed the Terezín Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related Issues. By endorsing the Terezín Declaration, countries committed to providing for the welfare of Holocaust survivors and completing restitution and/or compensation for property confiscated by the Nazis, and in some cases, subsequently nationalized by Communist regimes. States also committed to providing restitution or compensation for immovable private communal and religious property, heirless property, and movable property, such as Nazi-confiscated and looted art, Judaica and Jewish cultural property; improving access to archival material; establishing regular annual ceremonies of remembrance and commemoration; preserving Jewish cemeteries and sites of memory; and teaching about the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes in their public education systems and providing for funding and training of teachers and materials required for such education. This year's Conference provided participants and countries that endorsed the Terezín Declaration the opportunity to take stock of the work that has been done since 2009 and to identify the work that remains.

Having in mind the need to enshrine for the benefit of future generations and to remember forever the unique history and the legacy of the Holocaust (Shoah), which exterminated three quarters of European Jewry, including the premeditated nature as well as other Nazi crimes, the Terezín Declaration enumerated a comprehensive set of voluntary commitments in each of the above areas with the hope and expectation that participating states take administrative, legislative, and executive action, or whatever steps necessary, to implement and address those commitments directly and at times in concert with international and regional organizations, and with civil society representatives.

The November 2022 Conference was divided to the following panels: 1) From the Terezín Declaration Conference in 2009 to the Terezín Declaration Conference in 2022; 2) Education, Countering Disinformation and Future Remembrance; 3) National Strategies to Combat Antisemitism and Online Hate Speech; 4) Tackling Injustices from the Time of the Holocaust - Immovable Property and Looted Art; and 5) Social Welfare of the Holocaust Survivors and Help to Holocaust Survivors in Ukraine.

Participants and experts noted considerable but incomplete progress in many states in the areas of restitution, or compensation of former Jewish communal property and private



property of Holocaust victims and their heirs. Regarding heirless Jewish property, partial or full progress has been made by some states, but many countries have yet to address this issue. The 2009 Terezín Declaration on Holocaust Era Assets and Related Issues not only addressed the material losses suffered by individual victims, but also how resolution of these issues directly links to supporting the revival of Jewish communities and their ability to care for their needy and elderly survivors. Those governments that have taken tangible steps since 2009 were commended for doing so and all countries that endorsed the 2009 Terezín Declaration were encouraged to fully meet their moral obligations.

During the Conference, participants also had the opportunity to hear from international organizations, scholars, and advocates who provided detailed and comprehensive overviews of the status of Holocaust issues from their perspectives. These progress updates were important and valuable in raising the visibility of the principles of the Terezín Declaration and in creating new momentum to implement them. Participants said that if this is all we do, we will have failed the moment. Now, it is incumbent upon each of the governments that were represented and all states that endorsed the Terezín Declaration to take action to reaffirm and fulfill the commitments described therein. The moral obligation to act while still in the presence of living Holocaust survivors could not be clearer. Therefore, each state was encouraged to make a pledge that is serious, substantial and country specific. This will be the legacy of our 2022 International Terezín Conference.

There has been tangible, measurable progress in many of the areas covered by the Terezín Declaration. With the passing of hundreds of thousands of Holocaust survivors since the 2009 Prague Conference and the harsh demographic realities for the remaining survivors, it is urgent that commitments be fulfilled. There is no doubt that the Terezín Declaration established both a goal and a benchmark that drew attention to the needs of survivors and encouraged governments to move forward. There is no doubt that much restitution and compensation work remains to be done in some countries and, with sufficient political will, can and must be done.

The social welfare needs of many survivors remain dire. Their suffering was tragic and their needs are great. In some countries, Holocaust survivors live in or near poverty or are impoverished. Homecare, hunger relief, medicine, and socialization are among the essential services for survivors and other victims of Nazi persecution. Several states have developed pension or social security programs for those who originally came from that country but now live elsewhere. Countries that have not yet done so were urged to look at those models and consider developing similar programs swiftly so that survivors who suffered so grievously in their youth can live their remaining years in dignity.

Recent surveys by the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) and others have revealed a widespread lack of basic knowledge about the Holocaust, especially among young people. Holocaust distortion and denial have become widespread in political discourse in many countries and prominent on social media. With a dwindling number of eyewitnesses to the Holocaust, priority should be given to Holocaust education, not only in terms of teaching about history, but also as a way to use lessons learned to raise awareness about contemporary challenges. Holocaust education programs have increased, and memorial events have become the norm in the United Nations and in nearly all countries that participated at the Conference. The International Holocaust



Remembrance Alliance, which grew out of the 2000 Stockholm Declaration, now has 35 member states and 10 observer countries that promote Holocaust education, research, and remembrance and whose efforts should be supported.

New and innovative approaches in education, research, and programs related to the future Holocaust remembrance and promotion of tolerance strategies in society were discussed. Education is one of the strongest tools that can be used to strengthen young people's resilience against disinformation and to fight intolerance, discrimination, hate, and antisemitism. Engaging Jewish communities presents opportunities to foster and flourish mutual understanding. In this matter it is indeed very important to continue supporting the role of organizations working on this on a sustained basis, like IHRA and the OSCE.

At the Conference, participants welcomed a presentation on the European Commission's first-ever EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life. Some member states have already completed their individual country strategies and other member states are currently designing strategies and national policies, which should be assessed by the Commission by the end of 2023.

On the topic of online antisemitism and hate speech, social media platforms bear the responsibility to improve algorithms and endeavor to not promote the division of society, hatred, discrimination, and antisemitism, but on the contrary should positively motivate people to fight against these phenomena and encourage tolerance and mutual understanding.

The need for continued provenance research and the difficulty of matching looted art with original owners and heirs, as well as the reluctance of institutions and individual owners to surrender their holdings, has very much limited the implementation of the Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art which were reaffirmed and broadened in the Terezín Declaration and at this November 2022 Conference. States were urged to implement those Principles as well as to advocate for their adoption in general. Other forms of looted Jewish movable property including religious objects and cultural property have also not been adequately identified and efforts to return them to their communal or individual owners have often been blocked. These are important elements of Jewish heritage, and participants emphasized the need for urgent action to be taken to resolve this issue and to provide in rem restitution or compensation through a process that is expeditious, simple, transparent, and non-discriminatory.

In the thirteen years since the international community came together in Prague to assist Holocaust survivors and heirs, to preserve the sacred memory of the Holocaust, and to further Holocaust education, much has been accomplished but this mission is far from complete. States gathered here in 2022 to renew lasting commitment to the victims of the Holocaust and to preserving their legacy.

As host, I look forward to receiving the pledges of each state.

Ambassador Robert Řehák
Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Interfaith Dialogue and FoRB, Czech Republic