

# Immovable Property Review Conference Marks Progress on Holocaust Restitution

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## *Delegations Make Both Moral and Practical Cases*

With added urgency as Holocaust survivors reach advanced age, delegations from 41 countries gathered November 26–28 in Prague for the Immovable Property Review Conference (IPRC), agreeing that urgent resolution of restitution issues is a moral imperative that would also produce tangible practical and economic results.

*“We are not speaking only about property, but first and foremost about moral values,”* said Tomáš Kraus, Executive Director of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic. *“We want some progress... The clock is ticking very quickly.”*



The IPRC was the latest in a progression of meetings focused on righting some of the persisting injustices for victims of Nazi persecution, and as one observer noted: *“Justice delayed is justice denied.”* Moral issues played a key role, with attendees mindful of the suffering of victims. As International Auschwitz Committee Vice President Felix Kolmer said, referring to his time in a Nazi concentration camp: *“We did not think about property, we thought if we will survive the next minute, the next hour, the next day.”*

The conference included an appearance by Israel’s Deputy Finance Minister Yitzak Cohen, as individual countries presented reports on their progress in addressing restitution issues since endorsees of the Terezín Declaration last gathered two years ago. A “Green Book” including detailed reports on national policies and practices was distributed at the meeting. Varying historical conditions and different national laws mean that solutions also vary.

*“There are different ways to achieve justice... and not just one model,”* said Herbert Block of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. IPRC Co-chairman Jiří Schneider expounded on this idea, noting: *“It is about doing what is possible and we have collected examples of what is possible.”*



Special Advisor to the U.S. Secretary of State for Holocaust Issues and IPRC Co-chairman Stuart E. Eizenstat helped make the practical and economic case, saying that solutions must not harm those who unknowingly reside in homes that once belonged to Shoah victims. *“Achieving this result need not displace one single person,”* he said, before pointing to additional benefits, including a strengthened rule of law that is the foundation for economic success.

The IPRC was organized by the European Shoah Legacy Institute (ESLI) in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic and the Forum 2000 Foundation. ESLI is organizing a follow-up conference for 2013 in Brussels, focused on social welfare issues for Holocaust survivors.