



## For Immediate Release

### GLOBAL REPORT ON IMPLEMENTATION OF ART RESTITUTION OVER PAST 25 YEARS FINDS SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS BUT MANY COUNTRIES STILL LAGGING

*U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken delivers keynote address unveiling historic endorsement of Best Practices by 22 countries in art and cultural property restitution at event jointly convened by WJRO and the U.S. State Department*

**(Washington, DC)** March 5, 2024: Today at an event jointly convened by the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) and the U.S. State Department, a groundbreaking global report on art and cultural property restitution was unveiled by WJRO and the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference). The report, "Holocaust-Era Looted Cultural Property: A Current Worldwide Overview," shows that while seven countries have made major progress in art and cultural property restitution, 24 countries from among the 47 surveyed have made minimal to no progress. Additionally, the report emphasizes the critical need to direct attention toward art and cultural property in private collections, signaling a vital area for future focus.

At today's event, U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken delivered the keynote address via video, unveiling the historic endorsement of a document on Best Practices in art and cultural property restitution by 22 countries, led by those with Holocaust envoys. This endorsement marks the first governmental document on Holocaust restitution to be endorsed in nearly 15 years. WJRO applauds this historic endorsement as a significant step that will advance art and cultural property restitution. The Best Practices will enhance the 1998 Washington Conference Principles on Nazi Confiscated Art.

"Of the millions of works of art and cultural property stolen by the Nazis, countless objects still have not been returned to their owners. Today, too many governments, museums, dealers, galleries, and individuals still resist restitution efforts... while heirs confront staggering legal and financial barriers as they go up against opponents whose resources vastly outmatch their own," said **U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken**. He went on to say, "Today, the State Department is proud to announce Best Practices to help overcome some of these hurdles."

"This report underscores the critical need for advancement in art and cultural property restitution," said **Gideon Taylor, President of the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO)**. "Restitution from public bodies or private individuals is not just about returning what was taken; it's about reconnecting families and communities with their heritage. Over the past 25 years, there has been significant progress, but

much work lies ahead. The endorsement by 22 countries of these Best Practices is of tremendous importance as it sets out a road map for the future. We urge other countries, as well as museums, auction houses, dealers and private possessors to join us in ensuring justice and that rightful owners and their heirs are reunited with their cultural treasures."

The report finds that there has been significant progress in art and cultural property restitution over the past 25 years, but much remains to be done. Key developments include:

- Claims processes are now in place in many countries, but the numbers of cases handled and resulting restitutions often remain low.
- Five out of the 47 countries have established restitution commissions to facilitate claims, but the overwhelming majority of countries still do not have one.
- While there has been progress with public collections, there has been far less progress with regard to items formerly owned by individuals that are currently in private hands. There remains much to do with regards to provenance research, transparency of records and facilitation of claims of items that are today held privately.

The report presents ratings based on whether or not a given country:

- a) has done historical research on the subject, whether through a historical commission or otherwise;
- b) does provenance research on its collections;
- c) has a claims process, whether through a restitution commission or otherwise;
- d) has made a substantial number of restitutions.

Based on the above factors:

- Seven (7) countries have made major progress;
- Three (3) countries have made substantial progress;
- Thirteen (13) countries have made some progress;
- Twenty-four (24) countries have made little or no progress.

Click [here](#) to read the Executive Summary and [here](#) to see the full Report with information on specific countries.

In response to this global report, **Ms. Sharon (Glattstein) Singer, 62, from New York City** whose family hails from Edelény, Hungary, explained the importance of the return of her family's ancestral shofar. "My grandfather's shofar was hidden in the attic of our home in Hungary, before my family was sent to different concentration and labor camps during the Holocaust. It was last seen in the town's library. For us, the shofar represents more than just an object; it embodies our family's history and connection to our heritage. It is imperative that Hungary honors its moral obligation and facilitates the return of this cherished artifact.

**Stuart E. Eizenstat, the U.S. Secretary of State's Special Advisor on Holocaust Issues**, emphasized the significance of today's announcement, stating, "Today's Best Practices are meant to help the practical implementation of the Washington Principles, based on the last 25 years of experience in applying them. And as was the case with the Principles, the Best Practices were drafted with the awareness that there

are differing legal systems and that states act within the context of their own laws. While they are legally non-binding, they are morally important and, as with the Washington Principles, will advance art restitution.”

"We strongly encourage other countries to join the United States in endorsing the Best Practices, which were developed through intensive collaboration by an international network of special envoys and representatives responsible for Holocaust issues. The Best Practices will help the implementation of the Washington Principles and achieve further justice for Holocaust survivors and their heirs," said **Ellen Germain, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues at the U.S. Department of State.**

"[A]s our generation of survivors slowly fades away, time is of the essence. The time to right a historic wrong is now. For us Holocaust survivors [these] works of art are part of our cultural heritage, part of our lives, part of our past. They are the silent witnesses of the lives and loves of individuals, families and communities who were murdered cruelly and whose memories we cherish," said **Ambassador Colette Avital, Holocaust survivor and Chairperson, Center of Organizations of Holocaust Survivors in Israel**

Dr. Wesley Fisher, Director of Research at WJRO and Claims Conference, moderated a panel discussion on the future of art restitution, featuring leading experts in the field, to explore strategies and insights shaping the way forward.

A link to US Secretary of State Antony Blinken’s video and remarks can be found [here](#).

A link to the Best Practices can be found [here](#).

A link to the full art report, “Holocaust-Era Looted Cultural Property: A Current Worldwide Overview,” can be found [here](#).

A link to the Washington Principles can be found [here](#).

## **Background information**

On 3 December 1998, 44 countries participating in the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets endorsed the Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art. 47 countries endorsed the 2009 Terezin Declaration which incorporated the Principles. The groundbreaking report jointly released today by WJRO and the Claims Conference summarizes and analyzes the extent to which each of those 47 countries has followed the Principles. The. Also, today, in recognition of the 25th anniversary of the Washington Conference Principles, countries endorsed legally non-binding but morally important best practices, prepared with members of the Special Envoys Network on Holocaust Issues that clarify and improve the practical implementation of these Principles.

## **Speakers**

Speakers at the event, “25th Anniversary of the Washington Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art: Best Practices & The Way Forward” included: U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken (by video); Ambassador

(ret.) Stuart E. Eizenstat, the Secretary of State's Special Adviser on Holocaust Issues; Sara J. Bloomfield, Director, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; Gideon Taylor, President, World Jewish Restitution Organization and Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany; Ellen Germain, U.S. State Department Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues; Lord Eric Pickles, United Kingdom Special Envoy for post-Holocaust Issues; Colette Avital, Chairperson, Center of Organizations of Holocaust Survivors in Israel. Additionally, a thought-provoking panel discussion on the future of art restitution, featuring leading experts in the field, offered valuable insights and perspectives on the way forward.

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*WJRO represents world Jewry in pursuing claims for the recovery of Jewish properties in Europe (outside of Germany and Austria). WJRO was established by leading world Jewish organizations to address the restitution of Jewish property and to remind the world that the time has come to redress the enormous material wrongs caused to European Jewry during the Holocaust.*

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