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Fifteenth Anniversary of the Austrian National Fund - Commemoration at the Austrian Embassy in Washington DC

14 May 2010

Press Release of the Austrian Embassy in Washington DC of May 14 2010

On the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism, the Embassy of Austria in Washington, DC, hosted a commemorative event on Thursday, May 13, 2010. In addition to representatives from victims' organizations and the State Department, numerous guests also included several Holocaust survivors from Austria.

Hannah Lessing, Secretary General of the National Fund, presented a retrospective of the National Fund's achievements over the past fifteen years, as well as a summary of current projects and future initiatives. A major priority of the Fund is the support of older and needy Holocaust survivors. In addition, by selling art objects seized during the Nazi regime whose owners can no longer be established, the proceeds are used to directly benefit needy Holocaust victims. The Fund also maintains memorials and commemoration sites, subsidizes contemporary research projects and supports school projects in the area of Holocaust education.

The U.S. State Department's Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues, Ambassador Christian Kennedy, highlighted the successful cooperation with Austria in the implementation of the 2001 Washington Agreement on issues of restitution and compensation, the important contribution it has made to the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education (in particular during the Austrian Chairmanship in 2008/2009), and Austria's role in the preparation of the Holocaust Era Assets Conference that took place in June 2009 in Prague.

Ambassador Stuart Eizenstat who, as the U.S. Government Special Representative for Holocaust Issues, led negotiations with the Austrian Federal Government on the comprehensive 2001 Washington Agreement on issues of restitution and compensation, emphasized that since the establishment of the National Fund, Austria has shown consistent efforts toward assuming its responsibility for the darkest chapter of its history. By launching a series of new initiatives, Austria took on a leading role among European countries in the field of restitution. Austrian art restitution legislations is unique and exemplary worldwide, as are Austrian social benefits in the way of nursing care which are granted numerous surviving victims of National Socialism. Especially due to the dire financial situation of many Holocaust survivors, programs such as allowances for nursing care and pensions are of central importance today.

Since its establishment, the National Fund has contributed to building bridges to Austrian emigrants who found a new homeland in the United States following the atrocities of Nazi persecution. Apart from payments from the National Fund and the General Settlement Fund, applicants also receive ongoing information on Austrian restitution and compensation programs, as well as on Austria's allowance for social care and pension benefits granted to survivors in the U.S. Several Holocaust survivors who attended the ceremony at the Embassy expressed their recognition for the work of the National Fund and their appreciation for the many Austrian support programs. Most important, however, was the recognition of the victim's suffering and the feeling of not having been forgotten.

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