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The Austrian National Library restitutes publications looted by the National Socialists to the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism.

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On 1st June 2010, during a commemorative ceremony at the Austrian National Library, the President of the National Council Barbara Prammer, as Chairperson of the Board of Trustees of the National Fund, symbolically accepted three of 8,363 books seized during the National Socialist era, the previous owners of which had not been able to be traced. For this reason, the works were handed over to the National Fund of the Republic of Austria for Victims of National Socialism in compliance with the Art Restitution Law.

"Today is a special day for the National Fund", Secretary General Hannah Lessing stated in her speech: "Since the enactment of the Art Restitution Law 12 years ago in 1998, art objects are now being transferred to the National Fund for the first time, the proceeds of which can been used to benefit the victims of National Socialism."

The transferred books were subsequently repurchased by the National Library for 135,000 Euro. Secretary General Hannah Lessing announced that "the proceeds from these one-time looted objects will be received by those people who are most entitled to them: those people who – like the former owners of these books – were persecuted by the National Socialist regime. Those who, unlike the former owners, were lucky enough to survive, particularly require our assistance in their old age."

The publications which were transferred are "objects which without exception bear no indications as to the identities of their former owners", the National Library stressed in a press release. The provenance report, which was completed in December 2003, listed 52,403 objects which had been acquired by the National Library during the National Socialist regime. On the basis of this report and of the examination by the Art Restitution Advisory Board, in recent years 35,217 individual objects have been restituted to the rightful heirs of the persecuted former owners, according to General Director Dr. Johanna Rachinger at the ceremony. Rachinger described the transfer of around 8,000 heirless books to the National Fund and the simultaneous repurchase of the publications by the National Library as a "milestone in our efforts towards a comprehensive restitution of all books and collections unlawfully taken into the holdings of the National Library".

The main priority of the National Fund has always been to reach as many of the original owners or their heirs as possible. In order to come closer to achieving this goal, in 2006 the National Fund set up its own art database at http://www.artrestitution.at, which enabled a targeted online search for art and cultural objects today located in the museums and collections of the Republic of Austria or the City of Vienna which, according to the current status of the provenance research, were possibly seized during the National Socialist era.

"In searching for the original owners or their heirs, it was of particular importance to us that we not only do that which is required by the law but that we really make the best and most efficient possible use of all means of publication available to us. No heirloom, which is usually also of personal value, should be withheld from its entitled owner. In each case, the transfer to the National Fund and subsequent utilization of the artistic and cultural objects should therefore be the last resort, stressed Secretary General Hannah Lessing at the ceremony.

President of the National Council Barbara Prammer reported that since the beginning of the year, the holdings of the parliamentary library have also been subject to examination with regards to their provenance and potential restitution. This is being carried out in implementation of an amendment to the Art Restitution Law 2009, in order that not only art objects in Museums but all movable artistic and cultural works owned by the Federation (Bund) are examined.