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SCHAKOWSKY SAYS IT IS REPREHENSIBLE THAT INSURANCE COMPANIES CONTINUE TO DENY HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS THEIR RIGHTFUL CLAIMS

1100 SURVIVORS FROM ILLINOIS FILED CLAIMS FOR INSURANCE; ONLY 14 HAVE RECEIVED OFFERS FOR PAYMENTS

WASHINGTON, D.C. - During a hearing today of the House Government Reform Committee, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) said that it is reprehensible that insurance companies continue to deny Holocaust survivors their rightful claims. Schakowsky's Congressional District includes Skokie, home to one of the largest concentrations of survivors in the country.

"This is an issue that is beyond urgency. There are serious problems that need to be resolved and Congress has a responsibility to make sure that is done so that those who have lived to recall the Holocaust may also have some measure of justice and dignity paid to them," Schakowsky added.

The hearing was held at the request of Ranking Democratic member Henry Waxman (D-CA), Schakowsky and others to examine the status of insurance restitution for Holocaust survivors, victims and their heirs and the organization set up to resolve insurance related issues, the International Commission on Holocaust-Era Insurance Claims (ICHEIC).

"I have numerous concerns about the process, the lack of cooperation by insurance companies, and the length of time it has taken. Survivors are an aging population and the fact that so many issues remain unresolved and so many survivors and heirs have yet to receive a dime is reprehensible," Schakowsky said during the hearing.

Nat Shapo, who is the Director of the Illinois Department of Insurance and continues to work on issues relating to survivors, testified before the Committee.

"There are still some 10,000 survivors in Illinois and roughly 1,100 of them have filed claims for insurance. To my knowledge only 14 have received offers for payments," Schakowsky said.

She added, "I understand that there is a deadline for filing claims of January 31, 2002. I am also aware that serious outreach has been conducted. But is a deadline really necessary? Isn't it unfair to give survivors such a short time to apply when these companies have been stalling for a lifetime?"

Below is Schakowsky's full Committee statement.

**Statement of the Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)
Government Reform Committee Hearing on the Status of Insurance Restitution for
Holocaust Survivors, Victims and Their Heirs
November 8, 2001**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for convening this hearing today to evaluate the status of efforts to gain restitution for insurance policies that were sold to victims and survivors of the Holocaust but were never paid. My district includes Skokie, home to perhaps the largest concentration of survivors in the country and certainly in the state of Illinois, and this hearing means a lot to them. I appreciate the Committee's willingness to focus members' attention on this subject.

I want to also express my gratitude to our ranking member for the outstanding leadership he has demonstrated on behalf of Holocaust victims and survivors. He and his staff should be commended for the substantial time that they have invested in this issue.

We are fortunate to have with us today a witness panel full of extremely distinguished individuals. A lot of friends and familiar faces are here with us today. I want to extend a special welcome to Nat Shapo, who is the Director of the Illinois Department of Insurance and has been extremely helpful to my staff and me, and has spent a lot of his time focusing on issues of importance to survivors.

The most important voices we will hear today are those of the survivors who have traveled here to help us understand the profound impact and devastation that the Holocaust had on so many people. I thank you for being here with us.

The Holocaust was the most horrific human atrocity the world saw during the last century. Millions of Jews and others were brutalized, raped, beaten, dehumanized, enslaved, robbed, and murdered. Men, women, children, babies, and families were ravaged by the hateful acts of the Nazi regime. There is no way for me to put into words the unspeakable horrors experienced. We can only listen to the recollections of survivors of the Holocaust.

Those who have lived to tell the gruesome tales of the holocaust era from a first hand perspective were robbed of their childhood and livelihood and had their family history-indeed their whole world stripped away.

The Holocaust was not only the worst murder case in history, but it was also the biggest exploitation and theft. Jews and others were enslaved-worked literally to death for various companies. Millions of bank accounts were seized and millions of insurance policies were liquidated by the Nazis-with the assistance of insurance companies in Germany and throughout Europe. I am sad to say that, to this date, there has not been adequate restitution for the bulk of those crimes.

Negotiations to repay stolen assets are ongoing and the process is slow. To make real

progress will require the complete cooperation of foreign governments, and multinational corporations, who have yet to own up to their role in the crime of the last century. The fact that some insurance companies still deny responsibility or refuse full compliance with negotiations only adds to the suffering and prolongs the justice that survivors deserve.

We can not even attempt to repay them for the suffering and the loss. What we can do is to honor holocaust victims and survivors first, by never allowing our children to forget what happened and by denouncing in the strongest of terms, rhetoric and behavior that is tainted with the reminiscence of the Nazi era.

We must also make every effort to provide as much financial and material restitution for those to whom it is entitled, in as timely a manner as is possible.

Today we are focusing on the organization set up to resolve insurance related issues, the International Commission on Holocaust-Era Insurance Claims, ICHEIC and its members.

I have numerous concerns about the process, the lack of cooperation by insurance companies, and the length of time it has taken. Survivors are an aging population and the fact that so many issues remain unresolved and so many survivors and heirs have yet to receive a dime is reprehensible.

On November 10, 1997, almost four years ago today, I participated in a hearing in Skokie that was convened under the leadership of Deborah Senn, who was at the time Washington State's Insurance Commissioner. Danny Kadden, who is here today was there as well. We heard compelling testimony from people like Erna Gans, a leader in the survivor community who never received payment for the dowry insurance her father purchased for her when she was born. Unfortunately, Erna and so many others have already passed away.

There are still some 10,000 survivors in Illinois and it is my understanding that roughly 1100 of them have filed claims for insurance. To my knowledge, only a handful, 14 have received offers for payments.

I understand that there is a deadline for filing claims of January 31, 2002. I am also aware that serious outreach has been conducted. But is a deadline really necessary? Isn't it unfair, if only symbolically, to give survivors such a short time to apply when these companies have been stalling for a lifetime?

This is an issue that is beyond urgency. There are serious problems that need to be resolved and Congress has a responsibility to make sure that is done so that those who have lived to recall the Holocaust may also have some measure of justice and dignity paid to them.

I have specific questions for all of our witnesses. I look forward to the testimony and

again thank the Chair for this opportunity. □ □