

Vatican Accused of Withholding Nazi-era Archives

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Abstract

The Vatican was accused Wednesday of refusing to fully open its World War II archives at an international conference on Holocaust-era assets here.

Lord Janner, chairman of Britain's Holocaust Educational Trust, said the Vatican's lack of cooperation raised fresh suspicions about its wartime collaboration with Hitler's Nazis.

Janner also named 11 companies that he alleged had used slave labor from Nazi concentration camps and said the data, based on a new study, reflected a new focus with broad international implications requiring compensation of survivors.

Full Text

The Vatican was accused Wednesday of refusing to fully open its World War II archives at an international conference on Holocaust-era assets here.

Lord Janner, chairman of Britain's Holocaust Educational Trust, said the Vatican's lack of cooperation raised fresh suspicions about its wartime collaboration with Hitler's Nazis.

"If the Vatican has nothing to hide, they should open it (archives) up," he told reporters, adding that he did not believe Pope John Paul II was aware of the problem.

Janner also named 11 companies that he alleged had used slave labor from Nazi concentration camps and said the data, based on a new study, reflected a new focus with broad international implications requiring compensation of survivors.

Janner said his group repeatedly asked the Vatican for information but received no satisfactory reply.

"We need to know the truth and there is no reason why one of the greatest moral centers in the world cannot find that truth," he said.

This was needed so that the truth could be a matter of historical record, and so that where appropriate and possible restitution could be made to the survivors, he said.

"We do know that many monasteries saved many thousands of Jewish lives. We also know that others cooperated," Janner said.

Speaking of the slave labor issue, Janner said, "This is a massive new investigation with huge implications all over the world, including the United States."

The following companies, most of them German, were among those to have used slave labor from Nazi camps in the following pursuits: AEG (electronics); BMW (aircraft engines); Daimler-Benz (aircraft engines); Dresdner Bank (construction); Dynamit Nobel (explosives); I.G. Farben (synthetic fuel); and Ford (trucks), according to Janner.

Janner said the trust just completed a report on the issue of Nazi slave labor which found that about a million Jews died as a result of slave labor. There were 7.7 million non-Jewish slave laborers under Nazi control in late 1944, he said.

"I believe that these companies which are today run in a moral and decent way by honorable people will wish to make appropriate amends. There may be legal implications of a massive kind claims made against them but equally there is a huge moral obligation," he said.

The four-day meeting, which ends Thursday, involves 44 countries and 13 groups, including those representing Jewish, art, history and insurance interests.

The conference, sponsored by the U.S. State Department and the Holocaust Museum in Washington, is aimed at setting informal standards for returning looted art and property and on paying off old insurance policies taken out by Jewish families.

The U.S. delegation offered a set of principles to encourage cutting red tape at all levels and to agree that both religious and secular property should be returned so that "delay and obfuscation" don't "simply run the clock out" on elderly Holocaust survivors.

The Nazis looted an estimated 150,000 pieces of art from Western Europe during the war and some 500,000 pieces from Eastern and Central Europe.

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