

## **International Welfare Conference, Prague, 26./27. May 2015 - ESLI**

### **QUESTIONS**

1. How do you assess the progress that has been made since the Terezin Declaration of 2009 within the scope of the social situation of the survivors of the Shoah and the other victims of Nazi persecution?
2. From your perspective, what are the next steps that have the highest priority?

### **ANSWERS**

1. Almost six years have passed since the Holocaust Era Assets Conference and the Terezin Declaration, which resulted from the June 30, 2009 conference. I would not say that there has been no progress on the issue of the social situation of the survivors - but the advances that have been made are by far not enough. I am appreciative that after the Holocaust Era Assets Conference, the European Shoah Legacy Institute (ESLI) in Prague was founded. The ESLI is an important engine, which has continuously worked for years to realize the implementation of the points formulated in the Terezin Declaration. Unfortunately, the Terezin Declaration is still only a declaration or rather a memorandum of understanding. Therefore, it is not binding. In addition, no national government is bound to implementation. In my opinion, the government of the Czech Republic, which is exemplary in its support and efforts for the ESLI, should be paid a big compliment. If we saw such a commitment in all governments that have adopted the Terezin Declaration, we would have progressed much further today. Let me remind you that already in 2009 time was too short to still do something for the survivors who are in a dire social situation. We are talking about the elderly, well stricken in years. During the six lost years that have gone by since the 2009 Terezin Declaration, many of the survivors have passed on. And many who are still alive tell me: "We will not live to see the things you are doing for us. They will wait until we all have died." We need a binding agreement of the signatories to the Terezin Declaration as quickly as possible, which guarantees the implementation of this Declaration.

2. I would first like to stress once again that time is short: Unless something is done soon, we can save ourselves further efforts. Each year of inaction that goes by without drastically improving the social situation of the survivors, is a year that we need to be ashamed of. No matter what, we must ensure that the survivors are materially equipped in such a way that they are not worse off than the average person in their country. I know that there are major differences from one country to the other. The basis must, however, remain in any case, that this important requirement will be implemented in each country. In the countries where there is the so-called "Veteran Status", the survivors must receive this status and the related benefits. The funding of organizations that help survivors directly, advise them and work with them is also crucial. These organizations must be put in a position in the respective countries to fulfill their duties to the fullest extent. We cannot forget the organizations of the survivors themselves. It is of utmost importance to enable these organizations to do successful work, particularly by providing the necessary material resources. Our organization has its headquarters in Germany. Therefore I should address a problem that we are often confronted with in our daily work. On the part of the authorities, the survivors and their justified claims are very often met with hostility, suspicion and little empathy. Everyone has seen the way German authorities and courts deal with the so-called ghetto-pensions. I wish all employees of the authorities that are directly involved with the survivors and their representatives would receive training in order to be made aware of the special needs of survivors. Only if the employees of the authorities treat the survivors and their advocates in a positive and empathetic way, can real improvements be enforced.