

# **SURVIVORS ATTEND WHITTIER LAW SCHOOL CONFERENCE ON NAZI GOLD**

*(1998)*

Many Holocaust survivors joined an overflow crowd on Sunday, March 1, 1998 at Whittier Law School in Costa Mesa to hear of worldwide efforts to reclaim money and property stolen by the Nazis. Christoph Meili, the former Swiss guard who was fired after saving bank records of Holocaust victims, was a feature speaker.

Introductory remarks were delivered by William Elperin, whose acknowledgment of the survivors brought applause from the audience.

Delivering the keynote address was Lord Janner of Braunstone, Q.C., member of the British House of Lords, Chairman of the Holocaust Educational Trust, a vice-president of World Jewish Congress, and initiator of the 43-nation conference on Nazi gold in London. Lord Janner acknowledged the scholarship of Professor Saul Friedlander, holder of the Chair on Holocaust Studies at UCLA, which was established by The "1939" Club.

According to Janner, though compensation for financial losses may eventually be awarded, the thousands of claims filed on behalf of victims of the Holocaust will never be fully resolved. But he added, "I never would have dreamed that the very great cause of compensating Holocaust survivors for bank deposits, insurance claims and allegedly stolen art would burgeon as it has in the past two years. This is a campaign for truth, for restitution for survivors and their families, and a campaign for justice."

Lawsuits are pending in U.S. courts on bank deposits and insurance policies. Additionally, paintings allegedly plundered by the Germans have been identified by museum curators and by prosecutors. Seven congressional hearings have been convened on the issues with more to come, as well as an international conference scheduled for Washington in June.

Meili, granted permanent residence in the United States by President Clinton, was the luncheon speaker. Loud applause greeted him when he described how he was fired from his job as a security guard in Switzerland last year at Union Bank of Switzerland after he prevented the bank from shredding records that could be instrumental to the ongoing litigation. Meili said he was inspired by the film "Schindler's List."

Speaking on behalf of the U.S. State Department, Victor D. Comras, Senior Coordinator For Nazi Assets and Restitution Issues, called the action by the Nazis and those who cooperated with them "an unprecedented theft of assets from Holocaust victims." Comras further urged restraint when sharp differences emerged in the audience over how to deal with the Swiss government, a World War II neutral, and with Swiss banks, which received 85% of the gold Nazis looted from other countries and individuals.

Dr. Michael Berenbaum Chief Executive of the Shoah Visual History Foundation delivered an inspired address.

The "1939" Club played a key role in bringing the conference together under the direction of President William Elperin, board member Adelle Chabelski, and Whittier Law School Professor Michael J. Bazylar, all of whom are second generation. Esther Brenner, Barbara Gerson, Masza Rosenroth and Selma Sorger helped organize the event for the Club.

The conference was extensively covered by both national and international media, including the Los Angeles Times, which ran several prominent stories about the event.

The annual inter-national law conference was the fifteenth held by Whittier Law School, which relocated to Costa Mesa last summer from Los Angeles.