

# **British House of Lords Debate**

on

## **The International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance**

**Thursday 27 February 2014**

Excerpts of Statement by Representative of the British Government

### House of Lords Front Bench spokesman for Communities and Faith, Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon:

My Lords, I join other noble Lords in thanking and paying tribute to the noble Baroness, Lady Deech, for her contributions, not just to this debate but to the issue. This is an important debate for everyone, and we have seen and heard many personal and moving interventions from noble Lords today. The Holocaust will always have a universal meaning given its magnitude, the unprecedented and unparalleled suffering involved—as the noble Lord, Lord McKenzie, said—and the scarring of humanity that took place. We are collectively committed to ensuring that all our children and future generations understand the events of the Holocaust and can reflect on its consequences. We also remember the many lives which were so cruelly cut short, and we support and sustain the survivors, who are all too few. We are truly honoured by the presence of some of them here today.

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The noble Baroness, Lady Deech, the noble Lords, Lord Wills and Lord Bourne, and other noble Lords rightly drew attention to the issue of restitution. This is key to the concerns of the UK and the mandate of Sir Andrew Burns. The issue of restitution of property wrongfully seized by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945 is on the agenda. What has been described as the last injustice of the Holocaust has been played out recently in front of our media with the discovery of artworks stolen from victims of the Nazis and hoarded away or even displayed in museums. Sir Andrew continues to respond directly to the families of UK victims of the wrongdoing by actively lobbying other Governments to address Holocaust-era restitution issues. He and my ministerial colleagues have raised the issue of restitution of property with Ministers and officials from Poland, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Estonia and Lithuania. We are also having discussions with the US and Israel, interested non-governmental organisations and relevant international organisations such as the European Shoah Legacy Institute in Prague.

I reassure all noble Lords that we will continue to raise our concerns about the lack of implementation of international declarations on restitution. Moreover, we will go on highlighting UK initiatives on restitution, including the Spoliation Advisory Panel, established in 2000 to advise claimants and institutions in the UK on claims for the return of works of

art lost during the Nazi era, and will continue to push this through bodies such as the European Shoah Legacy Institute.

The record of other countries in addressing the issue of restitution of property, whether communal or private, is not all negative. For instance, there was the extraordinarily successful Austrian operation to compensate Holocaust survivors. We must also recognise that issues of legislation are matters for sovereign parliaments and that international agreements in this area of restitution are ultimately non-binding. We believe that there is more that countries can do to right this wrong. We will continue to put pressure on them and to play our part, bilaterally or collectively, through the offices and channels of the European Union.

I feel honoured and humbled to be responding to a debate of this magnitude and importance, not least by the presence of Holocaust survivors with us here this afternoon. I came across a prayer for Yom HaShoah which was found on a piece of paper in one of the concentration camps. It reads:

“Lord, remember not only the men of good will but also those of ill will. But do not remember all the suffering they have inflicted upon us. Remember, rather, the fruits we have borne thanks to the suffering: our comradeship, our loyalty, our humility, the courage, the generosity, the greatness of heart that have grown out of this. And when they come to judgment, let all the fruits we have borne be their forgiveness”.

The Prime Minister, on visiting Yad Vashem in Jerusalem in 2006, wrote:

“We owe it to those who died—and those who survived—to build a world in which this can never happen again”.

The pledge of our Prime Minister is the pledge of our Government. That is why Britain will remember. That is why Britain will never stand by. That is why I say to everyone present, both domestically and internationally, the past will never die, and its valuable lessons will not be forgotten as we build our future and our tomorrow for the benefit not just of ourselves but of generations to come.