

Title: **Holocaust-Era Looted Art: A Current World-Wide Overview**

Authors: Dr. Wesley A. Fisher, Director of Research  
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and World Jewish Restitution Organization  
New York, NY, USA  
[Wesley.Fisher@claimscon.org](mailto:Wesley.Fisher@claimscon.org)

Dr. Ruth Weinberger, Researcher, Looted Jewish Art and Cultural Property Initiative  
Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany and World Jewish Restitution Organization  
New York, NY, USA  
[Ruth.Weinberger@claimscon.org](mailto:Ruth.Weinberger@claimscon.org)

The ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums contains numerous sections that are relevant to questions of art and cultural and religious property plundered by the Nazis and their allies. Major intergovernmental conferences and resolutions have established international principles regarding provenance research and the restitution of art and other cultural property, most notably the Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art (1998) endorsed by 44 countries, Resolution 1205 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (1999), the Declaration of the Vilnius International Forum on Holocaust-Era Looted Cultural Assets (2000), and the Terezin Declaration (2009) endorsed by 47 countries. As a result, there have been some positive steps towards the restitution of movable artwork and cultural and religious property plundered from Jews, but progress has been slow, and there remains a very considerable amount of looted movable artwork and cultural and religious property that has not been recovered and that is still in private and public hands. Most recently this has come once again to public attention as a result of the recent discovery of a collection of over 1400 artworks in Munich, Germany and subsequent reforms by the Federal and State Governments of Germany.

No mechanism exists to monitor adherence to the ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums, and no mechanism was established to monitor progress by the 44 countries that endorsed the 1998 Washington Conference Principles. It is clear, however, that some sort of independent examination of progress is necessary, both within individual countries and among them. The main organizations of the world Jewish community active in the restitution of property looted from victims of the Holocaust, namely the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany (Claims Conference) and the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO), which have conducted extensive research over the years on the status of provenance research and of claims processes for the restitution of artworks in most, if not all, relevant countries, presented a report on such progress at the Holocaust-Era Assets Conference in Prague in 2009. Five years have passed since then. This paper presents an updated worldwide report on 50 countries.

The variations among countries' historical experiences and legal systems, as well as the complexities of provenance research and the establishment of claims processes, are such that it is not easy to make generalizations. But despite some positive developments since the Prague Conference in 2009 and despite the wake-up call of the discovery of the Gurlitt collection, most countries and most museums have not implemented the Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art, the Terezin Declaration, or the Code of Ethics for Museums of the International Council of Museums (ICOM). The Claims Conference/WJRO considers that the museum profession needs to take hold of the issues as a professional matter, and an International Association of Provenance Researchers needs to be formed. The Claims Conference/WJRO will work with ICOM and the various relevant governmental and non-governmental organizations to help initiate the creation of such an international professional association.