

YIVO INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH RESEARCH

ידי שער וויסנשאַפֿטלעכער אינסטיטוט - ירוא

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*Office of the
Executive Director*

January 27, 2004

SWISS BANKS HOLOCAUST



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The Honorable Edward R. Korman
In re Holocaust Victims Assets Litigation
P.O. Box 8309
San Francisco, CA 94128-8309

Dear Judge Korman:

This letter is sent in response to your request for comments and serves as a supplement to the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research's proposal of September 2000.

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research is charged with the mission of carrying on the process of remembrance for survivors, their families, and the public at large. YIVO itself is a survivor. Of the 750 Jewish academic institutions that existed in Eastern Europe before the Nazi's came to power, YIVO is one of the very few that remains. Our holdings were looted, our building destroyed and yet our survival is testimony to the strength and importance of our mission of preserving the past for future generations. We are the storehouse of the history of those who perished and the repository of the culture that survived for future generations.

YIVO's facilities and programs are utilized by a wide audience that includes survivors and their families who are seeking a connection to a world--to lives-- that were destroyed. YIVO maintains over 350,000 volumes in its library and over 23,000,000 items in our archives. We are home to the world's largest archive of materials on the life and culture of East European Jewry.

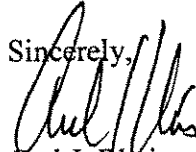
In our quest to "never forget" YIVO is the guardian of records, books, recordings, newspapers, journals, etc., that animated the daily life of East European Jews. Our collection includes Yizkor books, communal records, and eyewitness testimony from survivors recorded as early as months after the war's end.

In addition to the records of quotidian life, we preserve the sophisticated and urbane culture created by East European Jews prior to the war -- the art, music and literature whose influence is felt even today even though their creators have long since perished. YIVO Institute for Jewish Research takes seriously its responsibility and its mission to

inform the public about the lives that were lost and the culture that the Nazi's sought to destroy.

As you review our proposal we hope that you will keep in mind YIVO's unique historical link to the Shoah and our continuing service to the victims, survivors and their families.

Sincerely,



Carl J. Rheins
Executive Director

cc: Special Master Judah Gribetz

YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

Addendum to September 2000 Proposal for Funding IN RE: HOLOCAUST VICTIM ASSETS LITIGATION

The September 5, 2000 YIVO Institute for Jewish Research proposal outlined the impact of the Holocaust on the Institute and its core constituents in what is now Vilnius, Lithuania. YIVO was able, by transferring its headquarters to New York in 1940, to ensure that at least a remnant of the institution and its holdings would survive. Despite the destruction of Jewish life in much of Eastern Europe, a few of the YIVO staff were able to escape to America to carry on, working to rebuild the YIVO Library and Archives. The commitment to strengthening YIVO, and to keeping it alive and vigorous, is especially crucial to those who survived the destruction of the Holocaust, and to their descendants, because it holds their history, culture and memories in concrete form.

□ *Serving Survivors and Their Descendants*

On a daily basis YIVO strives to make all this wealth of information and history available to survivors and their extended families, and the public. YIVO's history closely parallels that of the survivor community: they understand the need for YIVO and we in turn understand our obligation to serve them. Serving survivors and their descendants is built into every aspect of YIVO's work. The YIVO Library and Archives hold the historical documentation of the lost communities in Eastern Europe, built upon the remnant materials recovered after the war, and added to since then. Survivors are able to view photographs of pre-war towns in the Pale of Settlement; artifacts of the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903; personal testimonies of Holocaust survivors from Lithuania, Hungary and Poland; pre-war telephone directories; community birth and death records; and rare books of Judaica, among many other things.

YIVO is charged with the overarching mission of carrying on the process of remembrance for survivors, their families, and the public at large. In fact YIVO is has one of the largest collections of *yizkher* (memorial) books in the world, and impressive holdings of communal records from the lost communities. Moreover, in the earliest days after of the war's conclusion, YIVO already saw the need for collecting and preserving the eyewitness accounts from Holocaust survivors. Collecting testimonies of the Holocaust period had been among primary goals of YIVO ever since. The drive at YIVO to reach out to all possible sources of Holocaust evidence was at its most intense from 1945 until the 1950s. In those years, before the founding of Yad Vashem, and before the establishment of Holocaust museums, YIVO was one of the few Jewish organizations which put all its organizational resources to locating and preserving documentary evidence about the annihilation of European Jewry.

For this purpose, a network of YIVO collectors was organized which included pre-war YIVO *zamlers* who had survived the war and were living in the displaced persons camps, Jewish chaplains and soldiers in the U.S. Army, and workers of Jewish relief organizations active in Europe. Special YIVO envoys were sent to Europe to coordinate the search. Informants were sought out mainly in the displaced persons camps in Germany, Austria and Italy, and also in Poland and other countries of Eastern Europe. As a result of this campaign the archive on the Holocaust was assembled which included, among other documentation, 1,143 eyewitness accounts. In 1954, YIVO entered into an

historic agreement with the newly founded Yad Vashem in Jerusalem to jointly conduct work on expanding the Holocaust archives and publish Holocaust documentation. One of the projects focused again on the Holocaust survivors. The YIVO began interviewing former ghetto inmates, prisoners of concentration camps, partisans and others about their experiences in the Nazi occupied countries. In time, these efforts yielded additional 500 testimonies.

The flow of Holocaust testimonies into YIVO collections was not limited to specially designed projects. The YIVO Archives today continues to acquire new materials from many individuals who wish to place their written accounts in a public repository. The number of eyewitness accounts at YIVO currently is close to 2,300 items. These document the Jewish experience under Nazi occupation between September 1939 and May 1945, including accounts relating to ghettos and camps; testimonies of Jews on the Aryan side and in hiding; memoirs of Jewish partisans and underground fighters; and testimonies of children.

Although the survivors' former lives were permanently disrupted and their communities often completely destroyed, the testimonies from these individuals paint a living history of both pre-war life and wartime experiences.

Perhaps unique to YIVO is the integral involvement of survivor's and their adult children at every level at YIVO. Among the distinguished survivors on the YIVO Board are Dr. Fanya Heller, author and lecturer; Benjamin Meed, President of the American Gathering of Holocaust Survivors; and Solomon Kristol, a pre-war trade union leader in Lithuania. As members of the YIVO Board they help set policy and goals for the organization.

Moreover, in the past three years two new committees have been created; committee members for the most part are survivors and the second generation. The International Women's Committee, led by Eta Wrobel, the former Partisan leader, is dedicated to promoting YIVO's mission. Most of these women are survivors; they contribute their ideas and energy to YIVO in order to preserve and teach younger generations and future generations about what was lost, and how they once lived.

A second YIVO committee, the Leadership Forum, is made up of younger men and women. Co-founded by Rita K. Levy and Cindy Stone, both children of survivors, and counting among its members other men and women of the second generation, they have made it clear that teaching about pre-war Jewish life – its great variety and complexity – is of the highest priority.

From their ideas and energy has come the Educational Program on Yiddish Culture (EPYC), a high school level curriculum developed at YIVO, which is now debuting in 18 schools in New York, Los Angeles and Mexico City, as well as in Israel. Through EPYC it is hoped that today's youth will learn about East European Jewish culture, with classroom and interactive activities to encourage new and deeper explorations and connections.

Finally, there are many survivors among the volunteers at YIVO and on staff. In many ways YIVO reflects the history of Eastern European Jewry in its staff and volunteers, as well. Survivors of Nazi and Soviet brutality abound at YIVO, are involved in day-to-day activities, and help keep YIVO true to its mission.

□ *The YIVO Encyclopedia Jews in Eastern Europe - An Update*

Under the guidance of Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Gershon David Hundert, the Montreal Jewish Community Professor of Jewish Studies at McGill University, Montreal, Canada, this multi-volume *Encyclopedia* will be a standard book of reference on Jewish life and culture in Eastern Europe, before during and after the Holocaust. A contract has been signed with Yale University Press (a new publishing house) to publish *The YIVO Encyclopedia*. The revised target publication date is 2007.

Today 1800 articles are in preparation, involving 400 authors from 14 countries. Most manuscripts are due in 2004. Those received already include articles on the Bund, Yiddish Literature Since 1800, Holocaust: An Overview, the Russian Empire, Relations between Jews and Non-Jews, Zionism and Zionist Parties, and Poland from 1939 to 2000.

The *Encyclopedia*, when completed, will provide the definitive history of East European Jewry before, during, and after the Holocaust. By describing the way of life of the lost communities and people, this compendium will document and memorialize the complexity and richness of that life and culture, and the distinguished individuals who labored on behalf of the greater Jewish community, including those who participated in political and religious movements, the scholars, artists, musicians, actors, writers, and others of note.

Creating this encyclopedia is part of YIVO's commitment to pre-war Eastern European Jewry, and to survivors. How can we assess the qualitative losses of the holocaust without understanding the live before? The YIVO Encyclopedia addresses what once was, the texts, traditions, languages and ways of life. It is undeniably one of the greatest projects initiated by YIVO; it is urgent that it be completed in a timely fashion to honor the memory of the lost communities, their many accomplishments, and the long history of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.

A readily accessible online version of the encyclopedia is an integral aspect of the project: Jews and others in the Former Soviet Union (FSU) will thus be able to use this great wealth of scholarly material without having to purchase the three-volume set.

Of the \$4 million dollar budget, \$2 million has been raised for the encyclopedia, from individuals as well as the Righteous Persons Foundation, the Charles Revson Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

□ *Rebuilding the YIVO Library and Archives*

Maintaining the accessibility of the YIVO Library and Archives is a major goal of this YIVO proposal. Preserving and opening up the Library and Archives, the repository of our collective history, is an absolutely critical part of this request. Maintaining and upgrading the YIVO Library and Archives is critical not only to scholars of the Holocaust but also to survivors and the public.

Since the end of the Cold War, the opportunity for international cooperation between YIVO and other major East European libraries, archives and universities has accelerated. Cooperative international microfilming projects are a practical way to begin filling in major gaps in the YIVO collections. As we work to collect information from these newly opened up original sources, we also are working to

build contemporary partnerships with the institutions holding those resources, especially in Lithuania and Poland.

Because YIVO also is a critical link in chronicling and assessing the great cultural achievements in music, art, literature, sociology and politics produced by the Jewish communities of Vilna, Prague, Odessa, Warsaw, Riga and other metropolitan areas in Eastern and Central Europe, these new partnerships are vital. Pre-war Jewish culture was urbane, producing a plethora of writers, artists, musicians, political and religious movements whose influence is still felt today even though their creators have long since perished. It is YIVO's charge to ensure that this history – the flowering of Jewish culture over a broad swath of Europe-is never forgotten.

As noted in the September 5, 2000 submission to the Court, YIVO would focus funds from this request, too, on filling gaps in the publications from communities across the globe prior to World War II, as well as for restoring the few works of art still remaining in the collections. The new and additional materials would replace material gaps created by wartime looting and destruction of the YIVO holdings. With these additions, YIVO will be able to maintain its preeminent position as a global resource center, meeting also our mandates to serve survivors and preserve our history.

Particular attention will be paid to building the Slavic Jewish collection, as well as to adding contemporary publications from each of the Baltic States, Ukraine, Belarus and Poland, and the former Soviet Union. This ingathering would also include material from the countries across the globe wherein succeeding generations have settled. None of this support would be spent on salaries or administrative overhead.

□ *Conclusion*

YIVO is the storehouse of the history of those who perished, as well as the repository of the culture that survived, and which continues to influence daily life worldwide. It provides daily service to survivors, their children and grandchildren, while working to preserve the history of our lost communities.

Although these losses cannot ever be redressed, YIVO is here to make sure they are not forgotten or minimized. The \$2 million in funds requested from the settlement with the Swiss banks will provide a foundation to ensure that YIVO's timely work moves forward with strength and vision.