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# jewish world

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## Not Giving Up



'People signed agreement because they had no choice' (archives)  
Photo: Reuters

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## Israeli Holocaust survivors sue Austria

**Jews born to wealthy Austrian families, which lost all their property during World War II, are claiming billions of euros in compensation. 'They must pay us everything we're entitled to,' they say**  
Eldad Beck

A group of Austrian-born Israeli Holocaust survivors is working to reopen the symbolic compensation agreement signed by Austria a decade ago and demanding payment "for all the property we were robbed of".

Jewish property has been evaluated in the past by Austrian historians at some €15 billion euros (\$21 billion), without interest.

Since the Austrian and US governments signed the symbolic agreement in 2001, Holocaust survivors have filed claims worth some €1.5 billion euros (\$2 billion), without interest. But the agreement states that Austria will pay the survivors and their offspring a total of \$210 million, so in most cases survivors received only 10% of the sum demanded in the claim.

When the agreement was signed, Austria had a conservative-national government which also included Jörg Haider's far-Right Freedom Party. The move was aimed at removing the country from the international isolation it was subject to at the time.

The Austrian leadership took advantage of the fact that Vienna's Jewish community was facing bankruptcy at the time in order to get its approval for the symbolic compensation arrangement ([Israel](#) was not part of the agreement). Now, 10 years later, the Austrian-born survivors are preparing to demand the rest of the money they deserve.

"I have no idea how the Austrians calculated the sum agreed on at the time," says Attorney Martha Raviv, a member of the group demanding to reopen the agreement.

Raviv was born in Vienna in 1938 to a family involved in the Austrian food industry. Her father was murdered in gas chambers near Buchenwald. Her sister was sent to Israel immediately after Austria was annexed by Germany.

Martha and her mother were sent to several prisons and concentration camps before being transferred to Israel in 1943, as part of a prisoner exchange deal between Britain and Germany.

As part of the compensation agreement, Martha and her sister received only \$10,000 for all of the family businesses registered under their father's name.

## 'Austria became rich by robbing its Jews'

Yohanan Ne'eman, 78, another member of the group of plaintiffs, was born and raised in Graz. His family traded in grains and owned a big department store in the Austrian city. In 1938, his parents sensed the imminent threat and quickly left for the Land of Israel, leaving all their belonging behind.

"We presented the Austrians with long lists of property," Ne'eman says. "After all their rejections, it was decided that we're entitled to \$880,000 in compensation, without interest. But because 20,000 claims were filed, and the overall sum was

## Never Forget!

### Vienna memorial for Nazi victims unveiled / Associated Press

Dedicated not only to Jewish victims but also to resistance fighters, remembrance site includes small exhibit that shows how Gestapo officials often used torture to torment those they summoned

[Full story](#)

predetermined, my brother and I received only 10% of this amount.

"Austria became rich as a result of the robbery of its Jews. This is unbelievable insolence. I tremble in anger every time I think about it."

"People signed because they had no choice," explains Doron Weisbrot, representative of the second generation in the group of plaintiffs. "When they received the compensation, they were forced to sign documents relinquishing any additional claims."

Meanwhile, the group members have received support for their demand in a letter sent to them from an Austrian parliament member.

"No real effort has been made to compensate for the damages caused to Jewish property during the Nazi era," admitted Eva Glawischnig of the Green Party. "It was clear to all those involved that the sum transferred to the survivors would hardly cover the property damages."