

Survivors outraged by new 'means test'

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The central Jewish Holocaust claims organisation this week criticised a German government decision to impose strict conditions on compensation for survivors.

Survivors, 113 of whom live in Britain, are due to receive additional monthly payments of about £200, on top of a lump sum of about £4,000, as a result of negotiations between the Conference on Jewish Material Claims from Germany and Bonn's Finance Ministry.

But to qualify for the payment, survivors must either have been in a concentration camp for six months or more, or in a ghetto or in hiding for at least 18 months, and must now be living in "difficult economic conditions."

Clemens Nathan, one of the two British board members of the conference, and a vice-president of the Anglo- Jewish Association, declared: "It seems outrageous to many of us that one has to be an 'undergraduate' of a concentration camp for six months before receiving compensation."

He continued: "These negotiations are incredibly difficult and the results are abysmal in relation to what is needed.

"The claims conference is in an exceptionally difficult position, because of the social and economic cutbacks in Germany, which have nothing to do with people who have suffered beyond belief without realistic help."

Stephan Kramer, assistant to the director of the Frankfurt office of the claims conference, went even further.

He said: "Our first goal is to receive payments for the survivors while they are still alive.

"We are simply running out of time. How long do people want to wait until they make payments to survivors? We cannot allow there to be a 'biological solution.'"

Shimon Samuels, director of the European office of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, told the JC: "Our position is that justice means restitution. The fact that some people came out of the camps, rebuilt their lives and did well means they should not be compensated seems to us absurd.

"Restitution is not a prize for survival. We take a strong position against this 'means test.'"

The German Finance Ministry spokesman said this week that the ministry was unable to comment.