

# US House Speaker Pelosi Calls on Polish Counterpart to ‘Use Every Possible Tool’ to Block New Law Closing Off Holocaust Restitution Claims

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by Ben Cohen  
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US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi has urged her Polish counterpart to block legislation that would effectively cut off the property restitution claims of survivors of the Nazi Holocaust.

In a letter sent on Friday to Elzbieta Witek, the Speaker of Poland’s parliament, the Sejm, Pelosi expressed her “strong concern” at the legislation, which passed through the Sejm’s upper house in July. It is scheduled for debate again in the lower house on Wednesday, after which, if successful, it will be sent on to President Andrzej Duda for his signature.

“Holocaust survivors, and other rightful owners, who fled Poland to escape antisemitism or Communist rule have waited for decades for justice resulting from the confiscation or nationalization of their property by the Communist government,” Pelosi wrote.

“I hope you will use every possible tool to ensure that this bill is not enacted into law and that no new barriers are imposed for Holocaust survivors and others seeking to recover their property or to receive just compensation,” the House Speaker added.

Other US lawmakers and official representatives have also voiced objections to the Polish legislation, which amends the country’s Code of Administrative Procedure.

Last month, the State Department’s special envoy for Holocaust issues, Cherrie Daniels, warned that the legislation would “cause irreparable harm to both Jews and non-Jews by effectively extinguishing claims for restitution and compensation of property taken during the Holocaust that was subsequently nationalized during the communist period.”

That followed a July 20 letter from a bipartisan group of US Senators urging President Duda to “press for the withdrawal of this bill from the Polish Senate, but, if the bill is passed, veto it.”

The chorus of criticism from the US has been badly received in Poland, with some nationalist politicians asserting that disproportionate Jewish political influence is behind the American stance.

Interviewed by Polish national radio on Saturday, Jaroslaw Sachajko — a representative in the Sejm of the right-wing populist “Kukiz ’15” party — alleged that US legislators had been misled by a “fifth column.”

In a “dog whistle” sentence that emphasized her Jewish last name, Sachajko accused the American journalist and historian Anne Applebaum, who is married to former Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski, of personally orchestrating the US response.

“The problem is again with the fifth column, maybe Mrs. Anne Applebaum, the wife of Sikorski, she publishes over and over again in very important and widely read American newspapers her articles defaming Poland and the Polish people, maybe she is the big obstacle here,” Sachajko declared.

Rafał Pankowski of the Polish “Never Again” Association, a leading anti-racism NGO, told The Algemeiner that Sachajko’s comments amounted to “borderline incitement to violence on national media.”

Pelosi’s letter to Witek was warmly welcomed by the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO), which advocates and negotiates with national governments for the property rights of Holocaust survivors.

“We welcome this powerful letter of support,” said Gideon Taylor, the WJRO’s Chair of Operations, in a statement sent to The Algemeiner.

“Property restitution and justice for Holocaust victims and survivors as well as for others who suffered is a broadly-supported priority for the United States government and the people of the United States,” Taylor pointed out. “We urge Poland to put this proposed legislation aside, and instead to sit and discuss a way to urgently address the problem of confiscated property while Holocaust survivors and other elderly claimants are still alive.”

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