Claims Conference Boosts Help for Greek Jews

By JTA

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The Claims Conference will significantly increase its aid to Greece's Jewish community in light of the country's economic crisis and the recent rise of a neo-Nazi party.

The Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany, which administers Holocaust reparations from Germany, said Tuesday it was increasing its assistance, giving $272,000 for 2012 to the Central Board of Jewish Communities in Greece for social services to Nazi victims. This is up from $86,000 in 2011.

Some 5,000 Jews live in Greece today. The prewar community of about 78,000, most of whom lived in the northern port city of Thessaloniki, was almost entirely wiped out in the Holocaust.

Among them are over 500 Holocaust survivors, who have seen their living conditions and social services deteriorate rapidly as the country struggles with the fifth year of a harsh recession.

Government pensions have been slashed, income from property rentals have fallen significantly and there have been steep tax hikes and price rises. At the same time state social services and medical assistance has been significantly reduced.

"Today's economic crisis has made these survivors more vulnerable than ever, at a time in their lives when they most need aid," Gregory Schneider, executive vice president of the Claims Conference, wrote in a report on the new assistance.

"The Claims Conference is taking dramatic and immediate action to help ease their situation as much as possible and to prevent a crisis from becoming a catastrophe for this vulnerable population," he said.

The Claims Conference also announced that following the rise of the Golden Dawn Party – a fascist party with a Nazi swastika-like flag and Holocaust-denying leader –it would also fund an educational program on anti-Semitism for the first time in Greece.

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Running on a populist, anti-immigrant platform, Golden Dawn won 18 seats in Greece’s 300-member parliament in elections earlier this month.

An allocation of nearly $120,000 will go to the Jewish Museum of Greece, which is establishing a program on anti-Semitism that includes a traveling classroom version of the museum’s exhibit.

“For survivors in Greece, already grappling with the catastrophic consequences of the government austerity plan, the emergence of this party adds another dimension to the upheaval that has already made their old age more difficult,” Schneider wrote.

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