

For Immediate Release
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Slave Labor Lawsuit Filed On Behalf of Holocaust Victims Suit is Believed to Be First Private Action Lawsuit

Six Holocaust survivors filed a lawsuit today against Philipp Holzmann, Germany's leading construction company, accusing the \$9 billion corporation of using them as slave laborers while they were prisoners of the Nazi regime.

Plaintiffs' counsel, William M. Shernoff of Shernoff, Bidart, Darras & Dillon, announced the filing of the lawsuit at a press conference held this morning at Bet Tzedek Legal Services in the Fairfax district of Los Angeles. Also at the press conference were Assemblyman Wally Knox (D-Los Angeles), Rabbi Abraham Cooper of the Simon Weisenthal Center, and Senator Tom Hayden (D-Los Angeles) who introduced new legislation, SB1245, that would grant legal standing in California to victims of WWII slavery and extend the statute of limitations for the filing of such lawsuits until December 31, 2010.

Justice is 50 years overdue for these people. We are seeking restitution not only for these six plaintiffs but for all California residents who were victims of these horrible atrocities, said Shernoff, whose firm has filed five Holocaust-era life insurance cases on behalf of survivors and their heirs.

The suit, filed in Los Angeles Superior Court, is the first-known private action lawsuit filed on behalf of Holocaust slave laborers. It seeks damages for intentional infliction of emotional distress, unfair business practices, and for the value of the services performed. The suit also seeks punitive damages, and injunctive and restitutive relief for the general public under Business and Professions Code Section 17200.

According to the complaint, the six plaintiffs - now Los Angeles residents - were taken from their homes in Lithuania by the Nazis and transported by cattle car to the Dachau Concentration Camp in July 1944. At Dachau, the plaintiffs, alongside 20,000 other concentration camp prisoners and prisoners of war, were marched five miles on foot everyday to a slave labor camp operated by the defendants to pile rocks and mix cement for underground aircraft hangers that would be used to build war planes for use by the Nazis. Working under extremely harsh conditions often without shoes or adequate food, the plaintiffs labored 14 hour shifts, 7 days a week. Those who could not keep up were often executed on the spot. One plaintiff named in the suit, David Osipowitsch, weighed just 80 pounds when he was liberated by American soldiers on May 2, 1945.

Philipp Holzmann AG is Germany's #1 construction company. Based in Frankfurt, the company operates internationally and has U.S. subsidiaries, including Holzmann USA and Metric Constructors, Inc. in California. The company built the Lufthansa Aircraft Hanger in Frankfurt between 1959 and 1961.

Plaintiffs' co-counsel Lisa Stern of the Law Office of Lisa Stern in Los Angeles said she hopes Senator Hayden's new legislation will restore the dignity that was stripped from these Holocaust victims who were shamelessly enslaved. ”