

Vilnius Forum Declaration **5 October 2000**

The Vilnius International Forum took place under the auspices of the Council of Europe in October 2000 in Lithuania as a follow-up to the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets of December 1998. The participating governments present agreed to the following declaration.

The Vilnius Forum,

Recognizing the massive and unprecedented looting and confiscations of art and other cultural property owned by Jewish individuals, communities and others, and the need to reach just and fair solutions to the return of such art and cultural property,

Referring to Resolution 1205 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art,

Noting in particular their emphasis on reaching just and fair solutions to issues involving restitution of cultural assets looted during the Holocaust era and the fact that such solutions may vary according to the differing legal systems among countries and the circumstances surrounding a specific case,

Makes the following declaration:

1. The Vilnius Forum asks all governments to undertake every reasonable effort to achieve the restitution of cultural assets looted during the Holocaust era to the original owners or their heirs. To this end, it encourages all participating States to take all reasonable measures to implement the Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art as well as Resolution 1205 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

2. In order to achieve this, the Vilnius Forum asks governments, museums, the art trade and other relevant agencies to provide all information necessary to such restitution. This will include the identification of looted assets; the identification and provision of access to archives, public and commercial; and the provision of all data on claims from the Holocaust era until today. Governments and other bodies as mentioned above are asked to make such information available on publicly accessible websites and further to co-operate in establishing hyperlinks to a centralized website in association with the Council of Europe. The Forum further encourages governments, museums, the art trade and other relevant agencies to co-operate and share information to ensure that archives remain open and accessible and operate in as transparent a manner as possible.

3. In order further to facilitate the just and fair resolution of the above mentioned issues, the Vilnius Forum asks each government to maintain or establish a central reference and point of inquiry to provide information and help on any query regarding looted cultural assets, archives and claims in each country.

4. Recognizing the Nazi effort to exterminate the Jewish people, including the effort to eradicate the Jewish cultural heritage, the Vilnius Forum recognizes the urgent need to work on ways to achieve a just and fair solution to the issue of Nazi-looted art and cultural property where owners, or heirs of former Jewish owners, individuals or legal persons, cannot be

identified; recognizes that there is no universal model for this issue; and recognizes the previous Jewish ownership of such cultural assets,

5. The Vilnius Forum proposes to governments that periodical international expert meetings are held to exchange views and experiences on the implementation of the Washington Principles, the Resolution 1205 of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Vilnius Declaration. These meetings should also serve to address outstanding issues and problems and develop, for governments to consider, possible remedies within the framework of existing national and international structures and instruments.

6. The Vilnius Forum welcomes the progress being made by countries to take the measures necessary, within the context of their own laws, to assist in the identification and restitution of cultural assets looted during the Holocaust era and the resolution of outstanding issues.