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\$10,000 reward offered for info on Nazi war criminals

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In a last-ditch effort to maximize the chance to bring Nazi war criminals to justice, the Simon Wiesenthal Center is offering \$10,000 "to any person who submits relevant information which will lead to the prosecution and conviction of a Nazi war criminal who will be punished for his or her crimes."

The reward was announced in Vilnius yesterday at a news conference kicking off "Operation: Last Chance," a special program to help identify as many perpetrators and potential witnesses as quickly as possible, thereby facilitating bringing to justice unprosecuted Holocaust perpetrators.

It was designed and implemented by Dr. Efraim Zuroff, head of the Wiesenthal Center's Israel office, together with Targum Shlishi, a charitable foundation founded and headed by Aryeh Rubin of Miami, who conceived of the project.

"Time is rapidly running out so we have to devise innovative ways to obtain the maximum information necessary to enable the prosecution of as many Holocaust perpetrators as possible," Zuroff told the Post prior to the news conference. "This project will hopefully significantly increase the number of prosecutions and convictions and enable the punishment of some Nazis who otherwise would never have been brought to justice," Zuroff said.

The practical difficulties of prosecuting Nazi war criminals are becoming increasingly difficult as time goes on, Zuroff acknowledged, and the chances of their being held accountable are rapidly diminishing.

"First of all, we face serious technical problems due to the advanced age of the suspects and the potential witnesses," Zuroff said. "Second, as prosecution becomes increasingly difficult, there has been a decrease in the political will of some governments to prosecute these criminals. Unfortunately, many governments simply prefer that these killers die rather than go to the trouble of bringing them to justice. Therefore if we don't do it now, the monsters will go free."

The \$10,000 reward applies to any Nazi war criminal who committed his or her crimes during World War II, regardless of his or her current place of residence, and those submitting pertinent information will remain anonymous if they so desire.

"Look, we've had some limited success going through the political and judicial systems of various countries," said Zuroff. "But we feel that this monetary offer will provide an added incentive for the average citizen who has the pertinent information but has declined to bring it to the local judicial authorities until now for whatever reason. It is entirely possible that some of the people who will provide the evidence are not exactly 'Righteous Gentiles,' but the significance of prosecuting these criminals in the countries in which they committed their crimes outweighs our squeamishness in paying money to people of questionable morality. We hope that it will be good people providing the evidence, but if they are good why have they remained silent until now?"

Zuroff said that in the last two years, more than 15 former Nazis have been convicted, in six countries.