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Box 76, Folder 6, West German statute of limitations, 1979.

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

WEST GERMAN STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS

MARCH 13, 1979

In January 1965 the imminent expiration (in May) of West Germany's 20-year Statute of Limitations on the prosecution of Nazi war criminals posed the critical question of how to keep justice from coming to a halt. Morris B. Abram, then President of the American Jewish Committee, who had served on the prosecuting staff of the Nuremberg Trials, in a legal brief and in a conference with the German Minister of Justice, urged that the 20-year period he reckoned from 1955, the year West German sovereignty was fully established, rather than from 1945.

Mr. Abram's memorandum, "Jewish Case for Extending Nazi Prosecutions," published in the New York Herald Tribune, elicited wide and favorable comment. It served as the principal document in a collection of materials that was widely circulated by the American Jewish Committee in a campaign of public education on this issue.

In a subsequent meeting with Chancellor Erhard and other high officials in Germany, Jacob Blaustein, AJC's Honorary President, reaffirmed the AJC position. In March, the German Parliament voted to extend the Statute, but took as the start of the 20-year count, the year 1949 when the Federal Republic was established. Thus the new cut-off date was set for the end of 1969, and the Committee, while welcoming this extension, nevertheless regretted that it did not go far enough.

With the approach of the new expiration date, the government of the Federal Republic of Germany again came under increasing world pressure to amend its laws and repeal the Statute of Limitations. American Jewish Committee leaders were in the forefront of world Jewish advocacy for such action.

In 1968, Arthur Goldberg, former Supreme Court Justice and U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, and then President of the American Jewish Committee, headed a delegation of AJC leaders that met with the West German Minister of the Interior to urge the further extension of the Statute of Limitations. Subsequently, Jacob Blaustein met with the German Ambassador in Washington on this matter. As in 1965, the Committee conducted a variety of educational activities designed to keep this issue alive before the public.

Such activity combined with the activities of other organizations, Jewish and non-Jewish, had the desired effect. In 1969, the West German government extended the Statute of Limitations another ten years, making the deadline December 31, 1979.