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**PRESS RELEASE**

**FORMER US SECRETARY, PROF. MICHAEL BLUMENTHAL - NOMINATED TO JOIN THE GERMAN COMMISSION ON LOOTED ART BY RONALD LAUDER.**

**The President of the World Jewish Congress nominated a former US Secretary of the Treasury, who escaped the Nazis in 1939, to join the top German art restitution body, known as the Limbach Commission which issues recommendations on restitution cases.**

There is growing criticism of how Germany deals with art, taken during the years of Nazi Terror. Yesterday an open letter was sent to German leaders calling for several changes, including the appointment of a Nazi victims' representative to the German Advisory Commission. The open letter was signed by lawyers from Europe and the US. It seems to have hit home.

“We welcome the call of Ronald Lauder, head of the World Jewish Congress for the nomination of Michael Blumenthal to the Limbach Commission on looted art. This will encourage survivors to return to the table. More changes are needed, but this is an important first step. During the last two years, families have been mistreated and history has been erroneously rewritten by the Commission in order to keep art in Germany. Decisions have ignored the historical facts. This is wrong and is a disservice to Germany and disrespectful to those who suffered during early Nazi terror. The addition of an independent Expert with a victim’s background, will rebalance history to reflect what really happened during early Nazi terror,” said Mel Urbach and Markus Stoetzel, knowledgeable lawyers who have appeared several times before the Commission. In 2013 they assisted in the return of an Alfred Flechtheim-painting. Three weeks ago, his heirs withdrew a similar case from the Commission, because of alleged irregularities during the process.

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Back cover of the "Illustrierter Beobachter" of 7 January 1933, a Nazi newspaper defaming Alfred Flechthaim (right) with an early and ugly doctoring of his image, giving him a devilish appearance and asking Germans to choose which image they wanted for the future of Germany. Flechthaim fled Germany shortly thereafter in fear of his life. His heirs were in Berlin four weeks ago seeking to reestablish a painting from his collection. They withdrew their case over alleged irregularities and have called for an investigation and other changes in the process.