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## NEWS & VIEWS

# Eye on 'Restitution'

*Canadian filmmaker Eric Scott is turning his lens on to the restitution issue in Poland*

**By Joel Ceausu**  
The Suburban

Restitution looks at the Polish government's refusal to legislate the return of property stolen from Jews during Nazi occupation and communist rule.

Unlike other countries that have enshrined the attempts to correct these injustices in law, Poland is claiming that honouring the legacies of Jewish victims and their ancestors would cause the country undue hardship.

Poland had Europe's largest pre-war Jewish population, more than 3.3 million and 90 percent of them were murdered in the Holocaust. Today some 25,000 Jews live in that country.

Most of the properties in question are actually without claimants as entire families were annihilated in Poland, where surviving Jews who returned to try to rebuild their broken lives after the war were often met with local violence and official indifference on the part of authorities.

Critics decry the roadblocks when much of the real estate in question is in the hands of government authorities who are purportedly trying to sell off the properties, despite thousands of legitimate claimants undergoing decades of intransigence armed with detailed and impeccable documentation testifying to ownership.

Others also believe the refusal of Poland to act is part of its efforts to disassociate itself from the Nazi crimes and Polish anti-Semitism.

Current estimates peg the value of pre-war Jewish property at about \$60 billion U.S. Warsaw pegs the value much lower, yet still pleads that its financial state precludes a legal remedy.

While the majority of claims against Warsaw are made by Christian Poles, the prevailing sentiment in some media and popular voices hostile to restitution claims have suggested that it is the Jews trying to empty Poland's coffers, evoking a narrative with dark hoary undertones in a country which was the venue of history's greatest crime.

Scott, whose documentaries have been viewed in 10 countries and numerous festivals, has sent a plea to the world for help to tell this story.

"This is an issue that is of exceptional importance, not only to those who've been struggling for justice for decades from Poland, but for many different communities around the world who find themselves in similar predicaments," he says. "This project is about opening a difficult discussion and speaking about the unspeakable that may lead to a tipping point, and finally get some justice and acknowledgement for those who deserve it. I can't finance it myself and I need your help."

His first film *Je Me Souviens* documented historian Esther Delisle's revelations about anti-Semitism and extreme right-wing nationalism in Quebec during the 1930s and 1940s.

For more information or to donate visit [www.restitutionthedocumentary.com](http://www.restitutionthedocumentary.com) ■