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# Press Release

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## **America's Leading Judges Examine the 'Lessons of the Holocaust'**

*Nationwide Initiative Originated in Prescott, Arizona*

An initiative started in 2006 by the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Prescott, Arizona took to the national stage on Sunday, August 2, 2009 when Supreme Court Chief Justices from all 50 of the United States and the six U. S. territories gathered at their Annual Educational Conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Developed by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and funded by the Hecht Family Foundation, the conference's joint educational session, "**Law, Justice, and the Holocaust: How the Courts Failed Germany,**" featured a historical overview of the role German courts played in the Holocaust. Next, the Chief Justices discussed how the lessons of the Holocaust apply to their current role and responsibility in American society. The response to the innovative program was overwhelming, with more than twenty-four of the Chief Justices requesting the program be presented at judicial conferences in their own home states. The Holocaust Memorial Museum will start honoring those requests as early as October of this year when the Museum's staff travels to the state of Oregon for the first of these invitations.

"Though an uncomfortable subject matter at times, it is educational to place ourselves in the time and manner of judges during the Third Reich," said moderator Honorable Ruth McGregor, retired Chief Justice of Arizona. "It is good to discuss how judges crossed the line from law—to a law altered to fit the thinking of a controlling society. To hear how the vocabulary of law changed, and how it happened so quickly."

The session in Santa Fe is the outgrowth of action initiated in March 2006 by the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Prescott when it sponsored twelve local law enforcement leaders to attend the Holocaust Memorial Museum's "**Law Enforcement and Society: The Lessons of the Holocaust**" in Washington, D.C.

Following this experience Yavapai County Attorney Sheila Polk worked with the Jewish Community Foundation and Holocaust Museum to bring a similar program to Arizona's 400 state prosecutors at the Arizona Prosecutors Annual Conference in the summer of 2007.

A year later Polk helped develop another version of the program for Arizona judges. "**How the Courts Failed Germany: Justice in the Nazi Era**" was presented to

approximately 700 Arizona judges at their 2008 Annual Summer Conference in Tucson. Honorable Ruth McGregor attended that conference and helped propel the program to the national stage.

One can sense the passion with which Polk believes in the program when she stated: "This program opens up so many conversations. It helps us rise above the day-to-day and see the larger landscape. It allows judges to re-examine their unique relationship to the people and the U. S. Constitution. We all take the same oath to protect the liberties of the people, their constitutional rights. It is important to keep this in focus."

Lest judges today consider themselves immune to distortions of justice perpetrated by judges during the Holocaust, Margaret Marshall, Chief Justice of Massachusetts and President, Conference of Chief Justices, issued this warning to those in attendance: "Don't think this couldn't be you."

When asked for comment, Dr. David Hess, President of the Jewish Community Foundation of Greater Prescott, said: "It has been simply amazing to watch the sequence of events unfold as this method for teaching ethical leadership has spread from our small community of Prescott, to then encompass every prosecutor and judge in the state of Arizona, to now the Chief Justices from all fifty states and the six territories. Over the next five years I can visualize the Lessons of the Holocaust being taught to every judge in America." Hess went on to say: "I can think of no better way to honor the memory of those who perished at the hands of the Nazis than to ensure that our justice system fully understands the important lessons that can be learned from the Holocaust."