



U.S., Germany Sign Accord to Protect Holocaust Sites

By Alan Elsner, National Correspondent
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WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The United States and Germany on Monday signed an agreement to work together to protect sites associated with the Nazi Holocaust of 6 million Jews.

The agreement covers cemeteries, places of worship, memorials and other sites of importance associated with victims of genocide during the Second World War.

Germany's U.S. ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, who signed the agreement, said at the ceremony, "The preservation of memorial sites is of special importance to me personally and to my generation and future generations of Germans."

The agreement was signed for the United States by Warren Miller, chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, a body established by Congress.

"The European Jews had everything taken from them, including their lives. Even in death, most were not afforded a burial place -- they were burned, their bones crushed, their ashes scattered," Miller said.

Even before the agreement, the two governments had been cooperating. In 2002 the commission and German federal and local governments were involved in a partnership to build a new memorial at the Buchenwald concentration camp.

They are partnering again to build a museum at the site of the Mittelbau Dora concentration camp.

Holocaust survivors and historians remain concerned by the deteriorating state of key Holocaust sites, especially in Poland where the bulk of European Jewry was destroyed in mass extermination camps like Auschwitz and Treblinka.

In Auschwitz, important remains such as two tons of hair shorn from victims and thousands of shoes are deteriorating. At other sites, including the extermination camp of Belzec where some 600,000 Jews are thought to have been murdered, there still is no proper memorial.