



February 25, 2019

Dear members of the United States Holocaust Memorial Council and the Committee on Conscience,

We write you as family members of those lost to genocide and as survivors and witnesses to mass murder and genocide perpetrated by the governments of Nazi Germany in the 1930s and 40s and Central America's military dictatorships backed by the United States in the 1980s and 90s. We have come together in the name of advancing values like those contained in the Council's core mission of preventing genocide. Our letter to you is written in the spirit of continuing the urgent work of the Committee on Conscience: to "confront and work to halt acts of genocide or related crimes against humanity."

It is in this spirit we write to question the choice of the Council in granting a committee seat to Mr. Elliott Abrams. Many of us were shocked to see news that President Trump appointed Mr. Abrams his Special Envoy to Venezuela. His return to the public arena sent shock waves in our communities and moved us to do the research to remind ourselves of Mr. Abrams' profoundly disturbing record. In the process of researching we learned that he is, in fact, a member of the Council's Committee on Conscience.

We write because, given the crucial mission of this institution, we cannot fathom how Abrams—a proven supporter of some of the world's most nefarious perpetrators of genocide and mass murderers for nearly 40 years—could be a member of your committee.

In his positions in the Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush administrations, Elliott Abrams participated in and sought to cover up some of the most inhumane acts of recent US foreign policy history. Memos released after the war in Guatemala reveal that Abrams was unconditional in his support of the Guatemalan military led by General Efraín Ríos Montt, who killed thousands of Ixil and other indigenous peoples. Last September 26, a Guatemalan court declared that the U.S. policy promoted by Reagan officials like Abrams formally led to mass killings there that were defined as "genocide." Mr. Abrams' resume also includes providing support to Salvadoran military battalions and death squads responsible for the El Mozote massacre of over 900 civilians, including hundreds of children. He also supported Salvadoran governments responsible for countless other massacres of tens of thousands.

Abrams' recent appointment has created an opportunity for the people of the United States to reflect on our government's foreign policies. Just over a week ago, U.S. Representatives Adriano Espaillat, Joaquín Castro, and Ilhan Omar rightfully demanded that Abrams' role not be merely buried in the past. We, the signatories, ask why the Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Simon-Skjoldt Center for the Prevention of Genocide have not taken Abrams' role in Central America into account. How can the Committee on Conscience prevent future genocides if it has not come to terms with the involvement of one of its own members in supporting such atrocities?

For these and many other reasons, we demand that the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum immediately remove Elliott Abrams as a member of its Committee on Conscience. His presence on that committee and his affiliation with the Museum runs contrary to everything that you and your mission stand for.

We hope and expect a response from you in the next week and are more than happy to discuss the matter with you further. In the name of full transparency, we must also let you know that we will take our concerns to the broader public, should you decide not to honor our request.

Sincerely,

The Call to Conscience Committee:

Mario Avila, survivor of torture whose brother was disappeared in Guatemala

Anna Baltzer, granddaughter of survivors of Nazi genocide, whose family members perished in Auschwitz

José Cartagena, survivor of repression in El Salvador who lost many fellow students and friends in the Rio Sumpul massacre

Liliana Cordova-Kacerginski, daughter of survivor of the Nazi genocide who fought in the Vilna Ghetto Uprising in Poland and eventually fled to Argentina

Margot Goldstein, daughter and granddaughter of German Jewish refugees to Argentina, from Nazi Germany

Sue Goldstein, grandniece of Rose Frankel, who perished in eastern Poland during the Nazi genocide

Carlos Mauricio, former professor who fled El Salvador after being tortured by police under orders of two generals trained by the US military at the School of the Americas

Noemi Perez-Lemus, Guatemalan survivor of torture under Ríos Montt dictatorship

María Luisa Rosal Vargas, defender of human rights and daughter of Jorge Alberto Rosal Paz y Paz, disappeared on August 12, 1983 in Guatemala

Rio Scharf, grandson of survivor who fled Berlin at 13 and who lost all of her family in the Nazi genocide

Nestor Villatoro, son of Amancio Samuel Villatoro, murdered by Guatemalan death squads in 1984