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Vienna Holocaust researchers quit over archives row

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By [Sylvia Westall](#)

VIENNA (Reuters) - A new Holocaust research center designed to build on the work of Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal was in jeopardy on Tuesday because of a row between researchers and a Jewish group over access to archives.

The seven-person academic team said it had quit the project to set up a Wiesenthal Institute for Holocaust Studies in Vienna which would combine Wiesenthal's huge documents archive with that of the local Jewish community.

The institute was intended to provide research and documentation of anti-Semitism, racism and the Holocaust.

But project researcher Anton Pelinka said the group representing Vienna's Jewish community (IKG) had blocked access to the community archive for months despite having initially given the go-ahead.

"The (Institute's) future is now completely in the hands of the IKG," Pelinka said in an e-mail.

"When they allow us access to the archive, then the Institute has a future, but none if they do not."

But the IKG denied it was blocking access to the archives saying it had been working hard to temporarily hand over part of the archive and was waiting for a response from the Institute's lawyer, IKG President Ariel Muzicant said.

"This should take place without pressure, ultimatums or resignations," Muzicant said in a statement entitled "IKG response to the resignation of the Institute's board."

He added that the IKG had put a lot of time and money into the project.

FEARS OVER DOCUMENTS

Rather than bureaucratic problems, the dispute actually boils down to fears within the Jewish community that documents they would provide the researchers would not be returned, Austrian newspaper Der Standard reported.

Before his death in 2005, Wiesenthal helped to track down Nazis, including Karl Silberbauer in Austria, the Gestapo officer who arrested teenage Jewish Holocaust diarist Anne Frank, according to the website of the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Jewish human rights group.

A death camp survivor, Wiesenthal opened the Jewish Documentation Center in Vienna in 1961 and built up a collection of around 8,000 files on Nazi perpetrators and crimes.

He built a large network of friends, colleagues, and sympathizers, including German World War Two veterans to glean information. He also got tips from former Nazis with grudges against each other, the website says.

Austria was part of the Third Reich in 1938-45 and provided a significant number of senior Nazi leaders, as well as Adolf Hitler. Almost all of Austria's Jews were deported to Nazi death camps or fled abroad.

The new institute had been scheduled to open by 2012 and move from temporary headquarters to Vienna's Palais Strozzi.

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