

Nazi hunt announced in Argentina

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BUENOS AIRES, Argentina --

A Jewish human rights group launched a "last chance" hunt for surviving Nazis in South America on Tuesday, hoping to track down perpetrators of genocide before they die of old age.

"The passage of time in no way diminishes the guilt of the perpetrators," said Efraim Zuroff, director of the Israeli Simon Wiesenthal Center as he announced the campaign.

The No. 2 Nazi on the center's most-wanted list is Dr. Aribert Heim, who is believed to be in either Chile or Argentina, Zuroff said. "The whole program would be worth it just if we found Heim."

The Wiesenthal Center is offering a \$460,000 reward for information leading to the capture and prosecution of Heim, who it says worked as a "doctor" in three concentration camps, injecting the drug phenol directly into the hearts of Jews and other prisoners to kill them. The Austrian and German governments put up part of the reward money.

Heim's daughter is currently living in Chile, Zuroff said, and the former Nazi doctor continues to maintain a bank account in Germany containing more than \$1.5 million.

If alive, Heim, known as "Doctor Death," would be 93 years old.

"I'm sure, God forbid, that if someone murdered your grandmother, and we found that murderer 60 years later, it wouldn't very much matter to you if that person was 70, 80 or 90," Zuroff said.

"All of the people who committed these crimes murdered someone's grandmother or grandfather, father or mother, son or daughter," he added.

"Operation: Last Chance" was first launched in 2002 in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

According to an annual report released earlier this year by the Wiesenthal Center, there are 1,018 ongoing investigations of Nazi war criminals in 14 countries. The yearlong period ending March 31 saw 21 convictions, primarily in Italy, a statistic that is "considerably higher than in past years," Zuroff said.

Many Nazi war criminals fled to South America, especially to Argentina, after World War II.

In November 1995, former Nazi Capt. Erich Priebke was extradited from Argentina to Rome, where at 93 he is serving a life sentence for his role in the massacre of 335 Italian civilians in 1944.

Priebke had lived peacefully for decades in the Patagonia mountain town of San Carlos de Bariloche, where he was found and interviewed in 1994 by Sam Donaldson for the ABC News program "Prime Time Live."

The most famous case was the 1960 capture in Buenos Aires of SS Col. Adolf Eichmann, the so-called architect of Adolf Hitler's final solution to exterminate Europe's Jews. Eichmann was hanged in 1962 in Israel, after a trial that led journalist Hannah Arendt to coin the term "the banality of evil."