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The Washington Times (04.07.2013) - Twenty members of Congress are accusing Romania of refusing to return massive amounts of church property that communists confiscated from the country's Jewish and ethnic-Hungarian communities.

However, the Romanian Embassy in Washington insists that the government in Bucharest is doing its best in a "complex situation" to provide restitution or compensation for more than 4,000 church buildings and other religious property taken by the communist government after World War II and held until the collapse the Marxist-Leninist state in 1989.

Thirteen Republican and seven Democratic House members wrote Secretary of State John F. Kerry in mid-June to urge him to pressure Romania into dealing with the claims of Christians and Jewish leaders who are trying to reclaim churches, schools, hospitals, orphanages and other property.

They called on the State Department to "vigorously engage the Romanian government to end the travesty of justice which it has perpetuated by failing to fully restitute properties illegally confiscated from religions denominations after 1945." They noted that Congress passed a resolution in 2005 that demanded that Romania settle claims by religious communities for the return of their stolen property.

"Nearly eight years have passed since that resolution, and the fall of communism was over two decades ago," they said.

The Romanian Embassy released a statement from the Romanian government to justify its efforts to deal with the religious claims.

"Romania is firmly committed to a solution that would completely restore, where possible, the original property rights, including those of religious denominations," said the statement, which was provided to Embassy Row.

Romanian law allows restitution of property or fair-market compensation, the government said.

"The issue of religious properties restitution to the Hungarian minority in Romania is part of the bilateral dialogue between Romania and Hungary," the government said.

The signers of the congressional letter include Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, Florida Republican, former chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and now head of the Middle East and North Africa subcommittee; and by Rep. Christopher H. Smith, New Jersey Republican and co-chairman of the congressional Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe.
