

Canberra The man who led the international hunt for Nazi war criminals, Simon Wiesenthal, last night urged Australian Jews never to stay silent about the Holocaust that claimed the lives of an estimated six million Jews.

Mr Wiesenthal was commenting on the decision by the federal director of public prosecutions that effectively ended Australia's European war crimes prosecutions, which have cost an estimated \$40 million.

Speaking from Vienna last night, Mr Wiesenthal, a Holocaust survivor himself, told 'The Age': "When people are old and ill, and we have had this not only in Australia, people say, 'Let the old people die in peace.'" But Mr Wiesenthal said those who had committed war crimes and were now living in Australia did not have the right to a peaceful death.

"For a survivor, nothing is enough. This (belief) belongs also to the Jewish population in Australia, who should not remain silent." "They (war criminals) lose their right to die in peace ... Maybe in another court they will find justice," Mr Wiesenthal said.

"We are not Nazis ... For the Nazi it is no different if people are sick ... We are civilised people.

"We must recognise that if the man is sick, he cannot stand trial but those people will not die innocent. Their neighbors will know who they are." Mr Wiesenthal said he knew the Australian war crimes trials had cost a lot of money, partly because of the need to send prosecutors and defence lawyers to Europe in search of evidence.

He also referred to the mass graves surveyed by Australian prosecutors as they sought evidence relating to the Adelaide trials.

The millions of dollars spent by Australia indicated it was serious about the war crimes prosecutions and the costly trip to Europe was evidence of this.

Mr Wiesenthal refused to speculate on the number of Nazi war criminals in Australia.

Without doubt, he said, there were a number of Nazi war criminals in Australia and they were "in the majority Nazi collaborators ...

Croatian and Hungarian collaborators".

But, he said, he had been working on Nazi war criminals for five decades and believed there were many more war criminals in Canada than in Australia.

Mr Efraim Zuroff, of the Jerusalem-based Simon Wiesenthal Centre, one of the main campaigners to bring Nazi war criminals in Australia to justice, told 'The Age' last night that Australia's campaign against those who had murdered millions of Jews and others during World War II was "hardly commensurate with the crimes committed by the Nazi war criminals living in Australia".

"One can reach the conclusion that Australia has afforded a haven to some of Hitler's worst henchmen," Mr Zuroff said.

"There are still people living in Australia, a few dozen at least, who can be prosecuted.

"Instead of closing down the Australian investigation into war criminals living in Australia, the Government should make a serious effort to prosecute those criminals who can still be prosecuted," he said.