

REPUBLIC OF POLAND
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Holocaust Remembrance

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S T A T E M E N T

by

His Excellency Mr. Andrzej TOWPIK

**Permanent Representative
of the Republic of Poland**

New York, October 31st, 2005

Poland welcomes and co-sponsors the draft resolution on Holocaust remembrance.

Our reasons therefor have been well presented in the statement made by the UK delegation on behalf of the European Union. I fully associate myself with this statement. Let me, however, add a few additional remarks.

The Second World War brought terrifying atrocities and destruction to many nations. Millions of Poles and Russians, British and Americans, Ukrainians and Byelorussians and members of other nations sacrificed their lives in defending their countries and fighting for liberty. Millions of soldiers and civilians perished in battles, prisons, mass executions and concentration camps.

The Second World War also brought one of the most horrible experiences in human history which we define today with the term "Holocaust". It was an attempt to eliminate an entire nation. An attempt based on racial and religious prejudices. An attempt which led to the creation of a whole system of exterminating people, a system including not only racist and criminal ideology, but also a horrifying machinery - an entire infrastructure - to implement this ideology: concentration camps and centers of extermination. It resulted in the planned and carefully executed murder of one third of the Jewish population along with countless members of other minorities.

We welcome the proposed resolution as a gesture commemorating the victims of the Holocaust. It is of particular importance to us - Poles. Poland lost three million - or over 90 per cent - of its Jewish citizens. The Holocaust put an end to a certain era, an end to the world created by Poles and Jews co-existing on Polish territory. The relationship between these two nations was not free from prejudices, frequently very painful ones indeed. However, it was in Poland that the Jewish community was able to enjoy a climate of freedom and tolerance for eight hundred years. It was in Poland that many Jews found shelter and escaped discrimination and persecution which they were subjected to in other parts of the world. In return for this many generations of Jews contributed to the creation of a unique spiritual, cultural and economic heritage that Poland takes pride in having. Their great contribution will be illustrated in the Museum of Jewish History, which is currently being built in Warsaw.

With this resolution we also pay tribute to those who stood against the crime of genocide and who helped its victims. We pay tribute to those who fought in Jewish ghettos and those who – risking their own lives – tried to assist Jews. These people have been honored with the distinction “*The righteous among Nations*” (“Chasidei Umot ha-Olam”). To us they are a role model, an inspiration for our younger generations. They remind us that evil can and should be opposed. We are proud that among the twenty thousand decorated with this distinction six thousand are Poles.

This resolution also rightly emphasizes that it is important to continue educating on the history of the Holocaust. It is the best demonstration of what ethnic and religious hatred can lead to. It is a tragic warning against any system which is based on ethnic and religious intolerance. It is also a powerful argument in favor of mutual ethnic and religious respect.

Poland will spare no effort to ensure lasting preservation of the remnants of Nazi concentration camps and extermination centers which were located in Poland by German occupiers. They should remain places that are open to the world, where historic reflection and education will take place in the spirit of democracy and tolerance.

It is our duty to shape the awareness of young generations in a spirit of tolerance, respect for human rights and sensitivity to any manifestations of discrimination. That goal could be implemented through educational programs – such as those planned at the Center of Education About Auschwitz and the Holocaust, to be created in Oświęcim, and the Institute of Peace and Reconciliation, which will study contemporary acts of genocide. Poland has also developed youth exchange programs, which are the best form of active dialogue allowing to combat stereotypes of the current generation by confronting it with personal experiences and people-to-people contact. An example of such a program is the annual March of the Living, in which Jewish and Poland youth participate, organized by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum.

Finally, the resolution reminds us that the main lesson which should be drawn from the terrible experience of the Holocaust is that we should not allow a similar tragedy to happen again, against any nation. The generation that has witnessed the horrors of the Holocaust is slowly passing away. Now it is our responsibility and the responsibility of this Organization to remember, to remind and to warn.