

Institute of National Remembrance

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Maciej Kwaśniewski: The Holocaust. Remembering is not enough

The Holocaust is also of particular importance to us Poles. It mostly took place in Poland and concerned Polish citizens. As a result of the criminal plan that was born in Germany ruled by the party of Adolf Hitler, six million Jews from all over Europe were killed. About three million of them were Polish citizens. Two million were children.

Starting from the so-called Nuremberg Laws, introduced in Germany in 1935 that made Jews subhuman, up to the Wannsee conference in January 1942, when arrangements were agreed to coordinate the functioning of the entire apparatus of the Third Reich for a "final solution" in the "European area of German influence" , everything had its criminal logic.

The crime was planned down to the smallest detail, almost to a single person. Everything was to be in order. Transport, death mechanics,

looted items, the use of human remains. Everything was foreseen and perfectly implemented. Criminals improved their practices and rationalized costs. They counted the kilometres that the victims had to travel, counted the minutes needed for killing. They tried to kill as soon as possible, as cheaply as possible and still make money on it. Everything was there in plans, tables and then in reports. As in the report of Fritz Katzmann, one of the performers of the crime, who counted kilograms of watches, coins, artificial jaws, gold and silver teeth, and even lighters and fountain pens taken from those who were going to die and who complained that in the extermination of Galician Jews eighteen Germans also died. Katzmann, the author of the famous report on the "final solution" for Polish Jews, wrote:

As at 23.6.[19]43, all Jewish residential areas were emptied. Not counting the Jews in the camps controlled by the SS and Police Commander, the Galicja district was freed from Jews.

How many were there? Katzmann was precise:

By 27.VI.1943, a total of 434,329 Jews were evicted.

What does eviction mean? It's the end of life. The final solution is meticulously planned.

It was the Institute of National Remembrance that published the Report by Katzmann, one of the unique documents that are direct evidence of the Holocaust. Just like the Jürgen Stroop Report on the final liquidation

of the Warsaw Ghetto. Now, for the first time in the world, the Institute of National Remembrance is carrying out a full edition of Hans Frank's *Diaries*, administrator of the General Government, the place where most Jews were killed. The INR collects documents and conducts research, including regarding World War II, concerning the murders of Polish and Jewish people. First of all, facts should speak.

The Polish underground authorities and the Polish government alerted the West about the situation in Poland. On September 17, 1942, the Civil Fight Management issued a statement:

In addition to the tragedy experienced by Polish society, decimated by the enemy, a terrible planned slaughter of Jews has been going on in our lands for a year. This mass murder finds no examples in the history of the world, all cruelty known from the history fades with it. Infants, children, adolescents, adults, the elderly, the disabled, the sick, the healthy, men, women, Catholic Jews, Jews of the Mosaic religion, for no known reason other than belonging to the Jewish people, they are mercilessly murdered, poison gas, buried alive, knocked down from the floors on the pavement - before death they undergo an additional torment of slow dying, hell of misery, torments of the cynical pasture of executioners. The number of victims killed in this way exceeds one million and is increasing every day.

Two months later, the Polish National Council in London declared:

The government of the Republic of Poland drew the attention of the

allied governments and the public opinion of the allied countries to the latest information about mass murders of the Jewish population in Poland, carried out systematically by the German occupation authorities. [...] The goal is to weaken the Polish nation and completely exterminate Jews in Poland by the end of this year. [...] The National Council appeals to all those nations which, together with the Polish nation, suffer under the German yoke, to immediately take a joint action against the Germans trapping and insulting all principles of morality and humanity and against the extermination of the Polish nation and other nations, the extermination of which manifestations are the mass slaughter of Jews in Poland and parts of Europe subdued by Hitler.

There were more similar appeals. Only political declarations was the West's response.

In occupied Poland, an underground Council to Aid Jews to the Polish Government Delegation for Poland was created - codenamed Żegota, gathering representatives of underground Polish and Jewish organizations, funded by the government in London, among others, providing false documents (about 50,000 produced) and records for those in hiding. Żegota was also involved in saving Jewish children. The unit in charge of this, run by Irena Sendler, found a safe shelter (e.g. in monastery orphanages) maybe even for about 2,500 children. There are also many known cases of helping Jews by individuals not affiliated with any institutions.

In the Polish society, demoralized due to the war, there were also cases of denouncing hiding Jews. This was condemned by underground authorities, including the death penalty for those who did it.

Adolf Berman, one of the leaders of Jewish underground political life in Poland during the war, cooperating with the Government Delegation for Poland and then with the communist underground, a co-author of appeals to the Western world for reactions to the murder of Jews, he wrote:

The description of the martyrdom of Jews in Poland often highlights the suffering that those hiding Jews suffered from Polish blackmailers and informers, navy blue policemen, fascist hooligans and other social scum. However, less is written about the fact that thousands of Poles risked their lives when helping Jews. Foam and dirt on the river's surface are easier to see than deep, underground, clean waters...

The International Holocaust Remembrance Day established by the UN General Assembly is associated with the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, the symbol and monument of extermination. But, such monuments are in fact in almost every Polish city and village.

The memory of the Holocaust should never be erased. Like other crimes against humanity, committed in the name of sick delusions that you can be inferior because of your nationality, race or political views. Both before and after World War II, there were equally monstrous crimes. At the end of the 19th century, the Belgians murdered almost

eight million native inhabitants in Congo. During World War I, the Turks exterminated, according to various estimates, from one million to one and a half million Armenians. Just 25 years ago, in Rwanda, within a few months, the Hutu tribe murdered about a million members of the Tutsi tribe.

Our task is not only to gather facts about crimes, but also to build universal values regarding life. Because no remorse is the biggest failure after such a crime.

John Paul II said during a visit to the Yad Vashem Institute:

Here, as in Oświęcim and many other places in Europe, we hear from all sides an echo of the excruciating tears of millions of people. Men, women and children are calling to us from the depths of anguish they have found. Could we not hear their scream? No one can forget or disregard what happened. No one can reduce the size of those events.

We want to remember. But we want to remember for a specific purpose, namely to never let the evil that millions of innocent victims of Nazism have suffered triumph.

How could man despise man so much? It was possible because they even despised God. Only a godless ideology could plan and carry out the destruction of an entire nation.

The tribute which the State of Israel pays in Yad Vashem to "righteous

among the nations" for the heroism they showed by saving Jews, sometimes even at the price of their own lives, is an expression of the belief that not all lights go out even at the darkest moments...

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