

Institute of National Remembrance

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Opening of the "Trails of Hope. The Odyssey of Freedom" exhibition in Israel





















On 6 June 2023, the representatives of the Institute of National

Remembrance headed by the IPN President Karol Nawrocki, Ph.D., the IPN Deputy President Mateusz Szpytma, Ph.D., and the IPN President's advisor Prof. Grzegorz Berendt, Chairman of the International Auschwitz Council, visited Israel. The purpose of the visit was the opening of the IPN "Trails of Hope. The Odyssey of Freedom" exhibition in the premises of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem. The exhibition was prepared in English and Hebrew.

In 1942, several thousand Jews, both Polish Army soldiers and civilians, evacuated to Iran with the Anders' Army. In the latter group, women and children prevailed. Upon reaching what was then the British Mandate of Palestine in 1943, they recovered from the hardships of Soviet captivity, while preparing for further struggle. At the same time, intellectual and artistic activity flourished, with Polish cultural centres and schools being established. The land also saw the formation of the Polish II Corps, which later fought on the Italian Peninsula. After the end of World War II, civilians were evacuated from these areas, most of them to the United Kingdom.

Around three thousand Jewish soldiers from Anders' Army decided to stay in Palestine and fight to establish the state of Israel. One of them was Menachem Begin, a law graduate of the University of Warsaw, former NKVD prisoner and a Gulag slave labourer, who later became the Prime Minister of Israel. He later described his ordeal in the inhuman land of the Soviet Union in his *White Nights* memoir. Together

with the Anders' Army, Begin got out of the Soviet Union and found himself in the ranks of the Polish Army in the land of Israel. That was where he decided to stay and fight for the new state.

This odyssey began back in September 1939, with the invasion of Poland by two totalitarian regimes: first the German Reich, and the communist USSR. The criminal occupation by the Germans here - in Israel - is a well-known fact. The Holocaust of the Jews and the extermination of the Polish population entailed millions of victims.

Under Adolf Hitler, Germany murdered as many as six million Jews, half of whom were Polish citizens. They perished simply because they had been born Jewish. Several tens of thousands were saved thanks to the help of Poles. About a thousand Poles were killed for taking the risk of helping Jews despite the threat of the death penalty. The Republic also lost nearly three million non-Jewish Poles as a result of extermination.

However, also under Soviet occupation, Poles - and their fellow citizens of other nationalities - experienced crimes and atrocities. As part of the Katyń Massacre, the Soviets murdered a significant part of the Second Polish Republic's elite, and among them - several hundred officers of Jewish

descent. Several hundred thousand Polish citizens - including Jews - fell victim to criminal deportations deep into the territory of the USSR in the years 1940-1941,

said Karol Nawrocki, Ph.D.

The exhibition opening coincides with the 80th anniversary of the establishment of the Polish II Corps under General Władysław Anders in the Holy Land, and the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the State of Israel.

The opening of the exhibition was attended by the Director of the Menachem Begin Heritage Center in Jerusalem Herzl Makov, Paweł Jabłonski — Polish Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Chargé d'affaires of the Polish Embassy in Tel-Aviv Agata Czaplńska and representatives of the Polish Institute.

The Institute's "Trails of Hope. The Odyssey of Freedom" exhibition brings closer this important part of shared Polish and Jewish history (...) May the exhibition serve as a reminder that - despite the occasional animosity between the representatives of our peoples - in times of difficulty, we can count on mutual cooperation, concluded the IPN President.

Earlier this day representatives of the IPN, together with Deputy Minister Paweł Jabłonski, lit candles on the graves of Poles in the Catholic Cemetery on Mount Zion and laid flowers at the monument commemorating civilians and soldiers of General Anders. The delegation was guided through the historic necropolis by Father Jerzy Kraj, a Franciscan friar who heads the Christian Information Center in Jerusalem.

To mark the 80th anniversary of the evacuation of General Anders' Army from the USSR, the Institute of National Remembrance has prepared an international educational and commemorative project entitled "Trails of Hope. The Odyssey of Freedom," which presents the armed struggle of the Polish Armed Forces during World War II and the fate of civilians released from Soviet captivity.

Polish soldiers fought on all fronts of World War II in defence of human dignity and freedom and in solidarity with other oppressed nations. The exhibition focuses on the heroic deeds of Polish airmen in the Battle of Britain, as well as Polish soldiers who fought at Tobruk, Narvik or Monte Cassino.

Scheduled to run from 2022 to 2025, the project is to cover over 50 countries worldwide.

The name "Trails of Hope" should be construed as referring to

a collective World War II journey of Polish citizens — soldiers and civilians — guided by the idea of liberating Poland and the world enslaved by totalitarian regimes.

For more about the "Trails of Hope" project, see:

<https://szlakinadziei.ipn.gov.pl/sne>

Downloads

[Trails of Hope. The Odyssey of Freedom / נתיבים של תקווה. אודיםיאה של חופש \(pdf, 34.05 MB\)](#)

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