

Institute of National Remembrance

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The UN Special Rapporteur visit at the IPN - 25 September 2018

On 25 September, Karima Bennouna, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Cultural Rights, Professor of International Law at the University of California-Davis School of Law and Johanne Bouchard, Human Rights Specialist at the United Nations Special Procedures Department, visited the headquarters of the Institute of National Remembrance. The visit was part of the Special Rapporteur's agenda in Poland.









She is going to visit a number of Polish cities and meet representatives of the government and local self-governments as well as employees of cultural institutions and people of culture. The aim of the visit is not only to assess the policy of providing representatives of various environments with the opportunity to access cultural heritage and manifest their own views, but also to talk about good practices and pay attention to the challenges of using cultural goods in the context of building a civil society. The report on the visit will be presented at one of the next sessions of the UN Human Rights Council.

On the part of the Institute, the following persons attended the meeting: Prosecutor Robert Kopydłowski from the IPN's Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, Agnieszka Jędrzak, head of the Division of International Relations in the IPN's Office of the President, Dr Mateusz Marek, head of the Division of Historical Education of the National Education Office of IPN, Sylwia Szyk - researcher at the Division of Polish History in the years 1945-90 of the Historical Research Office and Dr Marcin Majewski - head of the Archival Research and Publishing Department at the IPN's Archive.

The guests were presented the history, structure, mission and main tasks of the Institute of National Remembrance, taking into account the specificity of all substantive divisions. Foreign cooperation was also presented, special attention being paid to international platforms (including the European Network of Official Authorities in charge of Secret-Police Files, the Platform of European Memory and Conscience, the International Council on Archives, and working groups

encompassing the countries of the former Eastern Bloc). The last achievement of the IPN was mentioned, i.e. the successful attempt to include Jürgen Stroop's report "The Jewish residential district in Warsaw no longer exists" (in the IPN's resources) on the list of the UNESCO World Heritage. In the Archive, numbering 91 km of current files, there are such documents as "Journal" by Hans Frank, "Diary" by Paul Kremer, camp documentation, archives dedicated to Witold Pilecki, as well as materials from the trial of Rudolf Höss and the Nuremberg trials.

The conversation also concerned legal and organizational grounds of the Institute's activities. It was recounted that the functioning of the Institute is regulated by the Act on the IPN of 1998. While the IPN has been operating since 2000, the Chief Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation has got its predecessor in the Main Commission for the Examination of German Crimes in Poland, existing since 1945 (transformed in 1949) in the Main Commission for the Examination of Nazi Crimes in Poland). By law, the director of the Chief Commission is also the Deputy Public Prosecutor of the Republic of Poland. It was also underlined that the President of the IPN is responsible to the Sejm of the Republic of Poland for the implementation of statutory tasks, each time submitting an annual report on the institution's activities.

Among the Institute's current research priorities one can find such topics as the transformation of the political system after 1989, the functioning of the state security apparatus, research on opposition

circles, Polish-Jewish relations, as well as the celebration of the 100th anniversary of Poland regaining its independence in 2018. As for the Archive, which is the heart of the Institute, alongside the collection, preservation and digitization of the resources, an important task was to declassify the “classified collection”. The IPN Archive also permanently cooperates with foreign archival institutions in Europe and in the world, in accordance with the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance.

The Institute's mission was defined as the settlement of the difficult past in relation to two totalitarian regimes, restoring dignity to the victims, as well as the promotion of history in Poland and abroad. From the perspective of the IPN investigative division, the priority remains to bring to justice the communist and German criminals, as well as to explain the circumstances of these crimes, which is a form of restoration of the identity of the victims. In connection with the inquiry about the statistics of the investigations conducted, a reference to the annual publication of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, supplemented with data prepared by the Chief Commission was made.

The amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance was also discussed, including the provisions penalizing the defamation of the Polish Nation. Paradoxically, the doubts raised by this amendment resulted in the intensification of debates and polemics around important historical events. A report from the Special Rapporteur's visit to Polish institutions is going to be presented at one of the next sessions of the UN Human Rights Council.

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