



STOWARZYSZENIE ŻYDÓW KOMBATANTÓW
I POSZKODOWANYCH W II WOJNIE ŚWIATOWEJ
ZARZĄD GŁÓWNY
ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH VETERANS
AND VICTIMS OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR
MAIN BOARD



Stowarzyszenie Romów w Polsce
ASSOCIATION OF ROMA IN POLAND
ROMAN KWIATKOWSKI
Prezes Zarządu Głównego · President



Warsaw, Oświęcim, Paris, 14 June 2021

Distinguished Minister for Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas and State Secretary for Culture Monika Grütters

We were delighted to hear about the plans of the German Foreign Minister and the State Secretary for Culture to establish a "Memorial to the Victims of the German Occupation in Poland" and a "Documentation Site for the Victims of the German Occupation". These are noble initiatives and an embodiment of the need to preserve the memory of the most terrible period in human history, as well as the tragic past of our German-Polish relationships.

We are, however, dismayed that the Survivors, former prisoners of Nazi prisons and concentration camps and combatants of the anti-Nazi resistance movement, were not consulted in the process of establishing these two institutions. It also applies to the minorities which, through their exclusion from the political and social community, became particular victims of fascist ideology. Jews and Roma perished not because they were citizens, but above all, because the Nazi system, which relegated them to the category of 'subhumans'. They were deprived not only of any civil rights but of any human rights. The physical extermination was part of a racist plan implemented throughout Europe, with particular cruelty, however, implemented in the occupied territory of Poland. Place, where they lived, worked, and for centuries had created its rich and diverse culture.

Collective memory has its representatives, who have been commissioned to preserve and promulgate it. The establishment of memorial institutions should take into account the different experiences and perspectives of the Survivors and their representatives. We cannot imagine memorials and acts of remembrance without understanding the viewpoint of the survivors and the victims of the German Occupation in Europe.

The cultivation of memory will not be possible in the future without the preservation of testimonies of the inalienable nature of the crimes of the Shoah. It also applies to the descendants of the persecuted, who are already today, undertaking the burden of bearing ethical witness by counteracting social indifference and reviving memory in the present. Survivors, as moral witnesses, testify to the evil and suffering that affected them personally. Their descendants stand as witnesses to the experiences of their parents and grandparents. The cornerstone of their testimony is an ethical commitment, a fully responsible act of solidarity, which engages memory, both in the present and for the future.

The role of the survivors' descendants is crucial in the future. They are involved in passing on the memory of past events. Moreover, these experiences have affected and continue to affect the innocent. To this group, we should also count families of survivors and the communities in which they live. Many of them were confronted with intergenerational trauma as a long-term consequence of the persecution of their family members. The ethics of Holocaust remembrance, at a time when the last witnesses are passing away, requires the voices of the descendants of survivors to be heard.

The preservation of memory and its continuity requires the cultivation of two interdependent spheres. Firstly, the transmission itself and secondly, the reception of the memory of the Holocaust. The participation of the descendants in this process is fundamental. When the memory of the Holocaust

turns into the history of the Holocaust, they can correct the narratives from their diverse perspectives and counteract the distortion and denial of historical truth. This is the perspective of witnessing memory and preserving the testimony of those who experienced persecution.

Future generations will have to undertake the work of preserving the 11th Commandment: "Do not be indifferent!". This challenge is already being taken up by the descendants of those who were murdered and persecuted during the Shoah, the Sinti and Roma Holocaust, and those who experienced the terror of the German occupation in various parts of Europe. Children and grandchildren became the Guardians of Remembrance in their communities. They participate in numerous ways as part of civil society in the continuous renewal of the warning from Auschwitz: "Never Again - Never Forget!" and upholding the oath taken by the liberated prisoners of the German camp Buchenwald to "build a world of peace and freedom" for generations to come.

These were the Survivors, who over the past two decades initiated the process of passing on the memory to second and third-generation descendants in the International Prisoners' and Veterans' Committees. They are committed to continuing the work of preserving the memory for future generations, fighting anti-Semitism, anti-Gypsyism, racism and all ideologies of inequality, bearing witness to the experience of the Shoah, the Nazi occupation terror and personal responsibility in the era of contempt and exclusion. In their work of remembrance, they operate on an educational, social and humanitarian level, but often these activities require institutional support and anchoring in existing structures of memorial work.

We hope that the absence of representation of the Survivors and Descendants in both planned institutions will be rectified. We express our willingness to engage in a broad discussion on the future role of the young generation of descendants in preserving the remembrance in Europe and in the world, especially at a time when the voices of the last eyewitnesses are missing.

This is what remembrance of the victims of the Holocaust and all victims of German occupation terror in Europe and the world imposes and is fundamental for future generations to grow up to be free from racism and hatred, to respect the rights of minorities and to defend the shared values of social diversity, democracy, solidarity and co-responsibility for others.

We understand this joint call for the preservation of witnesses as a contribution to strengthening the dialogue on diverse perspectives of remembrance in Europe.



Stanisław Zalewski

Chairman of the Board, Polish Association of Former Political Prisoners of Nazi Prisons and Concentration Camps (PZBWPHWiOK),
Vice-President of the International Auschwitz Committee (IAK)



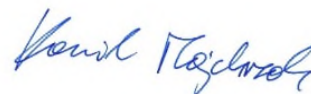
Marian Kalwary

Chairman of the Board, Association of Jewish Combatants and Victims of the Second World War



Roman Kwiatkowski

President of the Association of Roma in Poland



Kamil Majchrzak

Polish representation on the Executive Board of the International Buchenwald-Dora Committee and Commandos (ICBD)

Translated by Agata Maliszewska