



MARSZAŁEK SENATU
RZECZYPOSPOLITEJ POLSKIEJ

Stanisław Karczewski

Warsaw, *07* February 2018

DEAR SIRS,
PRESIDENTS AND MEMBERS OF
POLISH COMMUNITY ABROAD
ORGANISATIONS

Ladies and Gentlemen

For many years now, Poles at home and abroad have been experiencing harmful, unjust and – most importantly – untrue wording ‘Polish death camps’, as well as accusations of Poles being involved in the Holocaust, which is an insult to our national dignity and pride.

Therefore, it is high time for Poland, independent for 29 years, to stand up for the sake of historical truth. The adopted Act on the Institute of National Remembrance will help investigate the truth everyone is interested in.

Poles and individuals of Polish origin – twenty million people residing across the world – on many occasions have shown that they are more than capable of supporting Polish national interest. This was the case when Poland aspired to join NATO in order to take our rightful place in the family of European nations. Therefore, taking into account the good of the Republic of Poland, I call upon You to undertake every possible action to demand the historical truth.

As a nation, we are a community united by the common language, culture and history.

The Act on the Institute of National Remembrance amended by the Polish parliament reads: *Whoever publicly and despite the facts imputes responsibility for or complicity in Nazi crimes committed by the Third Reich to the Polish Nation or the Polish State [...] shall be subject to a fine or penalty of imprisonment of up to 3 years.* The provisions set out in this Act do not by any means censor public debate, limit research activities or artistic creativity. The only purpose they serve is to eliminate from the public discourse the lie about the complicity of the Polish nation and Polish State in the crimes committed on Polish land during the World War II.

In his speech, the Prime Minister of Poland, Mateusz Morawiecki, said: *Holocaust denial includes not only denying German crimes, but falsifying history in other ways as well. One of the worst forms of this lie is when someone diminishes the responsibility of real perpetrators and attributes that responsibility to their victims. We want to fight against this lie, in its every form. [...] Death camps, where millions of Jews were murdered, were not Polish. This truth deserves protection – as it is part of the historical truth about the Holocaust.*

Poland has been surprised by the response of global opinion, and in particular of representatives of the Israeli authorities, to the amendment of the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), as all the interested parties knew the draft Act.

We are looking forward with hope to the results of the work carried out by the experts panel set up by Prime Ministers of Poland and Israel, Mateusz Morawiecki and Benjamin Netanyahu.

I am firmly convinced that this is a good way to build bridges between the two nations, which have lived side by side for a thousand years and whose cultures have intertwined.

During World War II, Poland suffered unprecedented loss – 6 millions of Poles died, including 3 millions of Polish Jews. We lost a significant part of our territory, we went through displacement, exile, camps, plunder of property to an unimaginable extent and, finally, the planned destruction of Warsaw. Our parents experienced hunger, terror, death spreading in the streets of cities and villages. We lost our independence; we were left on the Soviet side of the “iron curtain”.

The Government of the Republic of Poland in exile was first to inform the international community of the dramatic fate of Jews. However, the Allies did not react to the reports presented by Jan Koziński-Karski at that time. The world reacted to information about the extermination of Jews by Hitler's Germany in the occupied Poland with indifference.

Only in Poland helping Jews was punishable by death for the whole family. Nevertheless, Poles were not indifferent to the fate of Jews imprisoned in ghettos and murdered in German concentration camps. Many Poles died saving Jews. The actions of the Council to Aid to Jews – “Żegota”, which operated at the Government Delegation for Poland, are also an exceptional testimony.

Apart from the acts which fill us with pride, certain shameful acts took place as well, though in no way do they determine the attitude of Polish nation as a whole. Those were isolated cases, punishable by death by the Polish Underground State, and we, in our time, also explicitly condemn them.

For many years after the war, Poland and Poles could not speak up for themselves because they did not have a sovereign state. At that time, we had no influence on shaping international public opinion, we could not defend ourselves against slander.

Ladies and Gentleman,

The Polish diaspora has always supported Poland. In various periods of our history, during the dark times of the Martial Law, the Polish diaspora supported Polish efforts to regain independence and full sovereignty. It also tried to make our voice be heard in the international arena. The Polish diaspora kept and cultivated Polish values – attachment to freedom, to Polish tradition and to the Church. Poland remembers this great commitment and is grateful for the help.

I believe that this time our compatriots will not let us down, either. I believe that patiently, together, we will build an agreement with Jewish communities in individual countries, giving testimony of the truth about World War II.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As the Marshal of the Senate of the Republic of Poland, which is tasked with custodianship of the Polish diaspora and Poles abroad, I call all our Compatriots from all around the world to document and gather any testimony of atrocities and crimes against humanity committed during World War II. The number of witnesses of those events is slowly decreasing as they pass away. It is necessary to record their memories in order to remember all and any wrongdoing against Jews, Poles, Romani people and any other victims.

Please, document and react to all manifestations of antipolonism, expressions and opinions that harm us. Notify our Embassies, consulates and honorary consuls of any slander affecting the good reputation of Poland.

I urge you to organise seminars, exhibitions, meetings, send letters and take action to effectively demand the historic truth. I also ask you to use your good, long-standing partnership relations with representatives of central and local administration, as well as civil society organisations from your countries, including those representing other national minorities, to promote solid knowledge about Poland and Poles. On each and every occasion, my multilateral international contacts make me realise that we have many loyal friends abroad, who are willing to engage in a dialogue with Poland as partners and to help us defend the good reputation of our Homeland. All Poles can and should be advocates of the Polish identity. I am deeply convinced that any step taken to this end will soon bring measurable, positive effects, both for Poland and for the whole Polish community living in different parts of the world.

I believe that your action will be an effective tool in efforts to maintain the good reputation of Poland and Poles.

*Yours faithfully
Ryszard Legutko*