



PREZES
Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej
Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni
przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu

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**Organizers and Participants
of the commemorative ceremony
marking the 83rd anniversary
of the Volhynia Massacre**

"People were murdered in horrific ways. Tongues were cut out, women's breasts were severed, eyes gouged out; they were flayed alive, and, after enduring such torture, their bodies were cast into the forest."

Ladies and Gentlemen, Honoured Representatives of the Volhynian Families and of the Former Inhabitants of the Eastern Borderlands,

As we commemorate the National Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Genocide committed by Ukrainian nationalists against the Polish citizens of the Second Polish Republic, we gather in remembrance of those tragic events, which still await an honest and just reckoning. On a summer Sunday—11 July 1943—human hatred manifested itself in its most barbaric expression. Units of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army launched simultaneous attacks on dozens of Polish villages and parishes. Defenceless farmers, women, the elderly, and children became the targets of an assault that laid bare the perpetrators' utter contempt for our nation.

We stand here today not out of a desire for revenge, nor are we driven by hatred. We have come together to honour the victims of the Volhynia Massacre, to remain faithful to the truth and, above all, to seek justice for them—justice that,

for more than eighty years, has yet to be fully served. The fate of our compatriots, brutally murdered in the south-eastern provinces of the Second Polish Republic under German occupation, weighs heavily on the hearts of successive generations of Poles. Despite the passage of time, we are still confronted with the enormity of a tragedy that defies all rational explanation. This was a premeditated genocide—an act of extermination, the result of years spent cultivating the criminal ideology of Ukrainian nationalism, fueled by the boundless hatred fostered by the German occupiers. Yet what is perhaps most horrifying of all is the thought of betrayal by people who had lived side by side for generations.

"Poles and Ukrainians had lived together in harmony. Before the attack, they even told everyone not to leave their homes after 9 p.m., to sleep soundly, and to keep the dogs chained, assuring the villagers that no harm would come to them. Yet the very next day, they carried out the attacks and the murders."

All that remained of the former Polish settlements were charred ruins. To this day, the scale of the atrocities continues to shock us. Approximately 60,000 Poles were murdered in Volhynia alone, and nearly 70,000 more in the south-eastern provinces of the Second Polish Republic. Together, these figures represent the loss of around 130,000 innocent human lives. The Volhynia Massacre was a cold-blooded campaign of extermination—savage and merciless in its execution, carried out with axes, pitchforks, scythes, and knives. Testimonies published in the volumes of *Documents of the Volhynia Crime* state explicitly:

"They led the children to the stables, stabbed them with pitchforks, and then flayed strips of skin from their bodies." Another testimony states: "The Ukrainians entered the houses in groups and murdered every Pole in sight. They smashed the children against the walls. They tormented the adults: slashed them with knives, hacked at them with axes, pierced their bodies with pitchforks, and cut them apart with axes."

We are a nation capable of great generosity and magnanimity. We have demonstrated this to the world by opening our hearts and homes to millions of Ukrainians fleeing Russian aggression. We remain committed to building good relations with our neighbour and to pursuing genuine reconciliation. One of the essential steps towards achieving this goal is ensuring that decisions concerning the search for and exhumation of the victims of the Volhynia

Massacre in Ukraine are not guided by political considerations. For many families, it is not a matter of politics. It is a matter of human dignity, remembrance, and respect. Among us are still those who lost their loved ones and are left with little more than faded photographs of the family members brutally taken from them. Yet time passes inexorably. They are growing older, and many pass away before they have the opportunity to lay their relatives to rest with the dignity and respect they deserve. They do not ask for political declarations. They have waited with quiet determination for the moment when they will be able to honour their loved ones and bid farewell to their family members with dignity, in an atmosphere of reflection, solemnity, and respect.

The Institute of National Remembrance continues its efforts to obtain the necessary permits to carry out search and exhumation works. Several applications submitted last year remain unanswered to this day. Thus far, the Institute has received only two search permits and one permit to undertake an exhumation. The murdered Poles remain in unmarked mass graves. At the current pace at which permits are being issued by the Ukrainian authorities, the completion of these investigations could take another two or even three generations. This is profoundly difficult to accept. Locating the burial sites and restoring the identities of the victims is not merely an expression of utmost respect—it is a fundamental human duty that transcends all political disputes.

I firmly believe that only dialogue grounded in respect for the memory of the victims will enable us to examine the most painful chapters of our shared history with integrity. Only such a responsible approach can prevent relations between our nations from being exploited by Russia's imperial policy to undermine trust between them, while providing a lasting foundation for good-neighbourly relations between Poland and Ukraine. Facts cannot be negotiated, bargained away, or distorted for political expediency. They require rigorous examination of historical sources and the courage to call things by their proper names, in accordance with established scholarly findings. Every genuine understanding must be founded upon sincerity and truth, entirely free from relativisation, the anonymisation of perpetrators, or any attempt to justify the crimes that were committed.

The position of the Institute of National Remembrance remains unequivocal: we will never accept the glorification of criminals or perpetrators of genocide. Genuine reconciliation between Poland and Ukraine, as well as strong bilateral

relations, can be built only upon mutual openness to the full truth about this unimaginable tragedy. Safeguarding the dignity and preserving the memory of our compatriots remain our highest duty.

Honour to the victims of the Volhynia Massacre! May their souls find eternal rest, and may their remains finally lie in consecrated ground.

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