

# Institute of National Remembrance

<https://eng.ipn.gov.pl/en/for-the-media/statements/1537,Statement-concerning-the-exhibition-on-Poles-saving-Jews-presented-in-Ottawa-and.html>

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## Statement concerning the exhibition on Poles saving Jews, presented in Ottawa, and the information published on the Internet

In the past few weeks, J. Grabowski - one of the academics of the University of Ottawa - attempted to block the presentation of an exhibition dedicated to people who saved Jews during German occupation, the Polish Righteous Among the Nations, and gave an interview published under the title "Polish diplomacy engaged in a nationalist Kulturkampf." J. Grabowski's statement is characterized by negative emotions, hardly based on facts.

The Institute of National Remembrance does not intend to comment on the invectives contained in this text, as well as in the letter which J. Grabowski disseminated among the employees and students at his home institution. However, the Institute can not remain indifferent to any attempts aimed at limiting discourse on people saving Jews during German occupation, nor can it ignore any actions intended to block the freedom of historical discourse. Moreover, the Institute can not ignore any attempts to prevent the promotion of the heroic attitudes of people risking their own lives to help Jews subjected to German extermination.

The Institute would like to inform you that the organization of the exhibition - with the consent of the Dean of the Faculty and in cooperation with the Polish Embassy - was a joint initiative of the Institute of National Remembrance and the Slavic Research Group at the University of Ottawa. Both the author of the script (Dr Elżbieta Rączy), and its reviewer (Dr Grzegorz Berendt) are renowned researchers in the field of the Holocaust. The exhibition was aimed at the ceremonial commemoration of the 76th anniversary of the establishment of the Council for Aid to Jews "Żegota" with the underground Delegate of the Government of the Republic of Poland to the Country. It was the only secret structure of this kind created in German-occupied Europe. It operated in the strictest conspiracy, in German-occupied territories, as an institution under the auspices of the Polish state, intended to offer specialized assistance to Jews in ghettos and outside them - in contradiction to the laws imposed by the Germans. Operating in the area where the Germans introduced the death penalty not only for hiding Jewish fellow citizens, but also for any form of assistance (offering temporary shelter, delivering food), risking their own lives, "Żegota" members aided at least 12,000 people.

The Institute is of the opinion that the commemoration of such heroic attitudes, also expressed through book publications and exhibitions about them, is the duty of everyone to whom the ideals of humanity and personal sacrifice for the benefit of others are of profound significance.

The Republic of Poland was the first country in the world to mount

armed resistance against the policies of the German Reich and Adolf Hitler. In 1939, abandoned by the Western Allies, Poland was unable to win the war against Germany and the Soviet Union, who jointly attacked our country. As a consequence of military aggression, Poland was subjected to ruthless occupation and totalitarian terror. As a result of World War II, about 5.9 million citizens of the Polish Republic were killed, half of that number being the Jewish population.

Poland did not capitulate. It transferred the seat of its official state authorities to the West, where it continued the war as a member of the Allied coalition. It made an enormous effort to reconstruct the armed forces in the West, directed to fight against Germany in Europe and Africa, also fighting side by side with Canadian units. Suffering heavy human losses in German-occupied Poland, it managed to build the structure of the Polish Underground State, which the Council for Aid to Jews "Żegota" was part of.

Both the Jewish and Polish population of the Republic of Poland (including Poles of Jewish origin) was subjected to German totalitarian violence in the years 1939-1945. Neither the Poles nor the Jews had any influence on the ruthless orders of German occupiers, segregating the inhabitants according to racial criteria. The German system of dividing people into the privileged German "race of masters" (Herrenvolk), situated above the Poles who were considered subhumans, and Jews deprived of any rights (and sentenced to total extermination beginning from 1941), meant an utter destruction of the pre-war structure of Polish society.

In the face of German terror and the forcefully introduced occupant orders, all social groups found themselves in a totally new reality. The fact that the majority of people in every community, subjected to totalitarian occupation and the provisions of imposed inhuman laws, wants to survive, is obvious to every reliable researcher of history. The aforementioned phenomenon concerned both Poles and Jews subjected to German terror. It should also be clear that both the heroes and the traitors can be found on the margin of the previously mentioned majority. The pressure of totalitarianism creates the conditions in which extreme attitudes, for which there would be no place in a free country, appear and multiply. On the one hand, there are attitudes of vile people and criminals who, for their own life or for comfort and career in the service of the occupant, are ready to pay with the lives of others. On the other - there are heroic attitudes of those who, despite the threat of losing their lives and their relatives, despite the threat of losing their freedom and at the price of suffering in inhumane conditions, are ready to help others. Each state has the right and obligation to indicate the attitudes of the latter as a universal role model. Each country attached to the ideals of freedom and independence has the right to erect commemorative monuments, build museums devoted to such individuals and organize exhibitions. The memory of heroes, ready for the supreme sacrifice for others in times of iniquity and enslavement, is - and should be - the foundation of every civilized community.

Each exhibition has its own theme. Temporary exhibitions, in a profiled way, present the segment of reality which has been chosen as the

subject of the exhibition. It is important that the subject matter of the presentation is clearly defined by its authors. The exhibition in Ottawa unquestionably fulfills this condition. In a synthetic manner, it presents various forms of individual and collective help for Jews, for which the Germans performed collective executions, murdering the Jews and the Poles who helped them. Saving Jews the Poles acted against the German-imposed orders. In such an occupational reality, German crimes, including those aimed against whole families of those helping Jews, were also taking place. The exhibition also shows selected profiles of people saving Jews.

Among the presented profiles, there are those belonging to the "Righteous Among the Nations". Based on selected examples, the exhibition familiarizes the viewer with people oppressed for such activities, post-war contacts of survivors with their saviors, and the fate of Jewish children saved by Poles. The exhibition is an important contribution to the description of German terror and the Holocaust, a way to portray these aspects of the German policy of terror and genocide, which - ruthlessly used in the Polish lands - many times exceeded the cruelty of the occupant's policy in Western Europe.

The exhibition was created in 2015-2016, and its ceremonial inauguration took place in February 2016.

The attempt to prevent the presentation of historical experiences in the form of an exhibition based on facts, means an attempt to block the discourse on the heroes of resistance against Nazi German enslavement. Any attempt of silencing scientific discourse or blocking

the presentation of its results, is incompatible with the ethos of the researcher of history - even if the results do not harmonize, or even interfere with the theses he personally promotes. Those who risked their lives to help Jews - despite the draconian penalties and principles of collective responsibility used by German occupant, can not be excluded from historical discourse. The impeding of the cultivation of the memory of those people does not agree with the principles which should guide a reliable scientist. It is similar in the case of any attempt aimed at discrediting tribute for the heroism of people who have demonstrated such great courage and dedication. After all, preventing the stories about the fate of heroes from being heard, just because of their nationality, is completely irreconcilable with respect for historical truth and for the victims of German Nazism.

On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that every manifestation of the eager cooperation of Polish citizens with the German occupant or the taking advantage of the occupational circumstances to act against fellow citizens, was at the same time an act of betrayal of the Republic of Poland. Today's free Poland is a continuation of the state institutions of the independent pre-war Poland and there is no reason to hide the truth about those who, for their own benefit became an instrument of the occupational policy. On the contrary, Poland's contribution to the war against Germany, as well as the scale of effort and bloodshed of its citizens in the fight for freedom, clearly requires the truth about each and every traitor. The Institute of National Remembrance in its publications consistently publishes materials and information about all those who cooperated with the totalitarian regimes of Hitler and Stalin.

There is no reason to hide the truth about any Polish citizen who, against his own country, has entered the path of betrayal and crime. There is also no reason why judgements should be withheld due to the fact that they were of Polish or any other nationality. The full truth about the history of the motherland is a condition for reliable education and one of the statutory tasks of the Institute.

The Institute of National Remembrance participates in various ways in the discourse on contemporary history, as evidenced by its numerous scientific publications and conferences, which are fully guided by the principle of freedom of scientific research, which does not place barriers limiting the presentation of results.

The Republic of Poland is a country of complete freedom of speech - including historical discourse. Researchers, including those critical of the current government, use public funds for scientific activities on an equal basis. This can be verified by checking publicly available lists on the websites of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Research on various aspects of the Holocaust and German occupation is not limited by anything; it is supported and financed by the Polish state. This information is accessible at hand and it can be used by any reliable critic, as evidenced by the rich literature devoted to the subject of the Holocaust.

Also this year, J. Grabowski published his texts in Poland. Regardless of the degree of their scientific reliability - they were subject to unrestricted discussion and varied, often also critical, assessments in Poland . This is a normal manifestation of scientific debate. J.

Grabowski used the materials stored in the Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance on numerous occasions. The appropriate place for a factual assessment of the quality of their use are polemics in scientific journals and other publications devoted to recent history.

The Institute consistently supports open scientific discourse, based on historical sources. As an institution established to reveal the truth about the totalitarian rule imposed on Poland by Germany and the Soviet Union, we also point to historical manipulations and falsifications. The Institute is aware that many of these methods are being used today in science and journalism. The fact that such approaches are reflected in the media market is also the price of freedom of speech and the freedom of press, which are irreplaceable values in any democracy. The Institute of National Remembrance, contrary to false narratives, has been guided by this principle since its establishment. Among others thanks to its efforts, over ninety thousand linear meters of files, previously classified in the communist state, were made available to researchers. The information they contain concerns both German Nazi as well as Soviet and communist activities towards Polish society during the war and the Holocaust, as well as in the era of communism imposed on Poland.

The IPN's archives are public and fully available to researchers-also for those who do not always respect the high standards of a scientist, easily retorting to using false, though catchy, accusations.

During the opening of the exhibition a short lecture was given by Tomasz Roguski, who was also the subject of criticism from J.

Grabowski. He is still a young scientist, specializing in the issues of social relations and the functioning of underground institutions during the Second World War. The subject of the doctoral dissertation he is preparing is *The Council for Aid to Jews "Żegota" - an institution and people in the structure of the Polish Underground State*. Regardless of individual skills and the ability to master stage fright when speaking to a foreign audience, it should be noted that its scientific value will soon be certified by the quality of the publication being prepared, based on extensive source material.

Anyone interested may confirm the above information, referring to the publications published by the Institute at:

(<https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/publikacje/katalog-publicacji/43598,Zaglada-Zydow-i-stosunki-polsko-zydowskie-podczas-II-wojny-swiatowej-katalog-pub.html>) Also those concerning the crimes of the Holocaust.

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