



POLISH LEAGUE AGAINST DEFAMATION
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RDI.W.S37.07.2018

Warsaw, July 5, 2018

**Mr. Adam Milstein
and Mrs. Gila Milstein
The Adam and Gila Milstein Family Foundation**

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Milstein,

The Jerusalem Post has recently published your article – a report on the journey to the extermination sites of Jews in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe – titled “FROM AUSCHWITZ TO AMERICA: LESSONS FROM EUROPE’S KILLING FIELDS,” which was reprinted in other electronic media. Unfortunately, the article contains many inaccuracies and distortions and is plain offensive to Poland and the Polish Nation, set up in a row with other nations whose attitude in time of World War II was opposite to the Polish one. The burden of accusations is all the greater because, as you inform, you have been accompanied by a group of 100 "philanthropists and scholars."

Therefore, the following theses need to be questioned and rectified.

1) “Auschwitz-Birkenau were built with a single purpose: to eradicate the Jewish and Gypsy peoples.”

Poland was the first and one of the largest victims of World War II, a victim of two totalitarian regimes – Nazi Germany and the communist Soviet Union in September 1939.

The Auschwitz extermination camp was initially intended for the Poles. The transports of Poles to the camp started in mid-June 1940, long before the beginning of the Holocaust. The Germans first began the extermination of the Poles and then the Jewish community (the decision was made at the Berlin-Wansee Conference in January 1942).

150,000 citizens of the Polish nationality were imprisoned in Auschwitz, half of whom were murdered. Omitting them in your story is first of all a downplay of the guilts of the actual perpetrators, but also a severe harm for the murdered and their families.

Moreover, why do you bring the image of the extermination of Jews only to Auschwitz? The Germans carried out mass extermination of Jews in many Jewish camps and ghettos, and probably the largest mass execution was committed on March 11, 1943 in the Majdanek Camp (in Lublin), where they shot over 18,000 Jews (including whole families) with the accompaniment of music.

2) *“Poland, where hundreds of thousands of Jewish families perished by firing squads because their gentile neighbors collaborated with or joined in when the German Killing Machine arrived.”*

Poland never collaborated with Nazi Germany.

In contrast to other countries occupied by Germany (including the Baltic countries you visited), in occupied Poland there were no voluntary political or military structures collaborating with Hitler. On the contrary, the Polish Underground State was established, i.e., the largest resistance movement in Europe with extensive secret political and military structures aimed at fighting the Nazi occupier.

In occupied Europe, Poland was one of the few countries where helping Jews was punishable by death. The Germans killed several thousand Poles who had helped Jews. A symbolic example here is the Polish Ulma family from the south-eastern Subcarpathia region, which gave shelter to eight Jews in their home for more than a year. The entire family (the father, the seven months pregnant mother, and their six children aged 2 to 8) was shot for this by Germans. The Germans killed many other Polish families for helping Jews – for example, Baranek, Janus and Madej, Kowalski, Kurpiel, Łodej, Olszewski, etc. Poles who helped Jews were transported to extermination camps, shot, hanged, tortured, and burned alive. The Germans also carried out pacifications of many Polish villages, with thousands of Poles killed. Those executions and massacres were to intimidate the Polish society and discourage people from helping Jews.

Hundreds of thousands of Poles helped Jews to survive the war and the Holocaust at the risk of their own and their families' lives. Poles constitute the largest group among the Righteous Among the Nations, i.e., citizens of various countries who saved Jews during the Holocaust. This honorific medal – given by the Israeli Yad Vashem Institute – was received by more than 6,700 Poles, i.e., 25% of all of the Righteous. According to some historians, at least 100,000 Poles deserve such distinction.

As was the case in other countries, during the war there were also cases of shameful behavior towards Jews in occupied Poland, but it was marginal considering the Polish society as a whole. This can be exemplified by the so-called “shmaltsovniks,” who blackmailed Jews in hiding and Poles who were helping them, or reported on them for money and other favors to the German occupying authorities. The shmaltsovniks phenomenon existed in all countries of the occupied Europe. Being a shmaltsovnik was punished by death by the Polish Underground State (with judgements passed by underground courts, and executed by Home Army soldiers).

During the war, there were also cases of shameful behavior by Jews in relation to other Jews and Poles.

Some Jews were shmaltsovniks too. In ghettos there were Jewish organizations collaborating with the Germans, e.g., infiltrating Jewish and Polish underground organizations (including those which aided Jews), organizing the transportation of Jews to extermination camps, etc. These included Judenräts, Jüdischer Ordnungsdienst (Jewish Ghetto Police), Żagiew, the so-called Thirteen, etc. There were also many Jews in the Polish lands occupied by the Soviet Union who collaborated with the Communists (for example, they denounced Poles, who, as a result of the denunciation, were murdered or sent to Soviet labor camps).

3) *“Poland, (...) who are committed to deny the Holocaust, and trade in antisemitic stereotypes.”*

Poland never has denied the Holocaust. Why should we do so if Polish people also were its victims? The amendment to the law passed in early 2018 was aimed at education and counteracting defamation accusing the Polish state and the Polish nation of cooperation with Nazi Germany, e.g., by using the slanderous phrase "Polish camps" instead of "German camps" which aim at transferring the responsibility from the executioner to the victim. There can be no consent for this; we believe that

the signing of the joint declaration by the prime ministers of Poland and Israel will contribute to the joint fight against any attempts to falsify history.

Poland has never been and is not anti-Semitic. Before the World War II it was inhabited by population of three million Jews – the largest in Europe. As nowhere else they could find here security, conditions for growth and development of their culture. There have been cases of ethnic disputes, but they had an economic background, not national or religious, and like during the WWII, they were marginal.

In present times, even if individual Poles present attitudes described as anti-Semitic, they are a response to the blazing anti-Polonism spreading in many Jewish environments. This problem was also mentioned in the declaration signed by the prime ministers of Poland and Israel.

Nowadays, Poland is also one of the safest places for the Jews. The Polish Embassy in Tel Aviv issued 2,665 passports in 2016, whereas in 2017 this number grew to 3,530. If Poland is no longer a safe country for Jews, as many people seem to suppose, where does this great interest in our country come from?

As you probably experienced during your trip in Poland, Jews don't need a police escort. Various Jewish festivals, events and celebrations (e.g., the Jewish Culture Festival in Kraków and the Singer's Warsaw Festival) are safe, and enjoy huge popularity, not only among visiting Jews, but also among Polish people and visitors from other countries. These things look different in many European countries. In Poland nobody mocks the religious customs of the Jews. Quite to the contrary, they are respected, and frequently attended by the Polish government officials. There are also numerous museums devoted to Jewish culture and history, such as the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum (the Warsaw Ghetto Museum is to be established soon), as well as cafeterias, shops, education centers and synagogues – none of which has to remove offensive slogans or graffiti on a daily basis.

In connection with the above, we demand that you correct this information in the media that published the report prepared by you.

Polish League Against Defamation