

## Speech by

**H.E. President of the Republic of Poland Andrzej Duda**

**during commemorative ceremony of the 75th anniversary of the liberation of  
the German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp Auschwitz**

**27 January 2020 in Oświęcim**

*Honourable Survivors, Witnesses of the Holocaust!  
Excellencies, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen!*

"A train has just arrived at the unloading ramp. People started to get off the freight wagons and walked towards the grove. [...] When I got up in the morning to wash the floor, people were walking [...]. Women, men and children. [...] I went out at night in front of the block - in the darkness the lamps over the barbed wire were shining. The road lay in the darkness, but I could clearly hear the distant hubbub of thousands of voices - people were walking and walking. Fire rose from the woods and lit up the sky, and with the fire, a human cry rose. [...] For days and nights, people were walking [...]. The wagons were constantly coming up to the ramp and - people were walking on".

This is how Auschwitz was described, in the summer of 1944, by the Polish prisoner of the camp, writer Tadeusz Borowski. Crowds of people walking, led, driven to mass death. We, in Poland, know well the truth about what was happening here since it was recounted to us by our compatriots who had camp numbers tattooed on their bodies by Germans.

Seventy-five years have just passed since the end of that monstrous, horrendous, criminal nightmare which was unfolding in this place for almost five years. It has been three generations since that day, the 27 January 1945, when a few thousand prisoners – exhausted with the cruelty of the perpetrators, with slave work, hunger and disease – lived to see the liberation by the soldiers of the Red Army.

We have here with us today the last living Survivors, who have endured the hell of Auschwitz. The last of those who saw the Holocaust with their own eyes. And among them those who experienced the fate of the Jewish Nation

as referred to in Psalm 44: "we are killed all day long, we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered".

We have come here together – members of 61 delegations from all over the world – to commemorate jointly the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. We are standing in front of the gate leading to the camp which claimed lives of the biggest number of victims and which has become the symbol of the Shoah. We pay tribute to all the six million Jews murdered in this and other camps, in the ghettos and places of torture.

We stand here before You, Honourable Survivors, in order to assume anew, in the presence of the Witnesses of the Holocaust, an obligation – thinking of those who perished, of You who have survived and of the future generations.

The genocide perpetrated here by the functionaries of the Nazi Third Reich, claimed more than one million three hundred thousand human lives. Among them were Poles, Roma, Soviet prisoners of war – but first and foremost Jews, of whom over one million one hundred thousand were slain here.

We are speaking about numbers but these numbers represent concrete people, their histories and their suffering. We are speaking about numbers though we will surely never get to know the exact figure. We are speaking about numbers for we are in the factory of death. For the numbers make us realize the industrial nature of the crime committed here.

The Holocaust, of which Auschwitz is the main place and the main symbol, constituted an unexampled crime throughout the entire history. Here, the hatred, chauvinism, nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism assumed the form of a mass, organized, methodical murder. At no other time and at no other place was extermination carried out in a similar manner.

Jews from Poland, Hungary, France, the Netherlands, Greece and from other occupied countries all over Europe were brought here in cattle cars, underwent selection and were deprived of all their belongings. And, in their vast majority, immediately killed in the gas chambers. And burned in the crematoria ovens. All of that took but a few hours, quarters, minutes. For years, the factory of death operated at full capacity. Smoke was rising from the chimneys, the transports were rolling. People walked and walked in their thousands. To meet their death.

It is hard to encompass it all with your mind. The magnitude of the crime perpetrated here is terrifying. But we must not look away from it. We must never forget it.

When the front was approaching, to put an end to the crime, the perpetrators attempted to obliterate its traces. They were destroying the buildings and the documents of the genocide. Having slain millions, they also wanted to wipe out the memory of them. However, their attempts failed. Witnesses were saved, of whom You, Honourable Survivors, are the last ones. And this very place has been preserved - the tangible evidence and the symbol of the Holocaust.

Hence, we stand here today, on the premises of the former German Camp Auschwitz. We stand all together and bow our heads before the suffering of the victims of this most horrendous crime in history. And before the Survivors, in the presence of the last Witnesses, we assume an obligation for the future.

**In the name of the Republic of Poland,**

who was the first target of Nazi Germany's aggression,

whose territory was occupied and its nation subjected to terror,

who established the largest European underground resistance movement against the Third Reich,

whose soldiers were fighting against Germans on all fronts of WWII from the first to the last day of the war,

whose six million citizens died at the hands of Nazis, including three million Jews,

and who makes an utmost effort to preserve this place: the premises of the Auschwitz camp – as well as all other places of the Shoah: the former German camps located in our territory,

**I have the privilege and honour to renew the obligation,**

which we, Poles, assumed back then when the Holocaust was being carried out, when our forefathers came to the aid of the murdered Jews, putting at risk their own lives, who were the first ones to reveal to the world the truth about the Shoah and demanded response from the world statesmen,

the obligation to which we, the contemporary Poles, consistently adhere – also for the sake of the memory of our heroic compatriots, such as Witold Pilecki and Jan Karski:

**to always nurture the memory of and guard the truth about what happened here.**

I wish to invite the Distinguished Guests gathered here today, representatives of foreign states and nations, as well as international institutions and all people of good will from across the world, to participate in this endeavor. Let it be our joint commitment undertaken before the last Survivors and Witnesses: to keep carrying into the future the message and the warning, for the whole mankind, which stem from this place.

Distorting the history of WWII, denying the crimes of genocide and the Holocaust as well as an instrumental use of Auschwitz to attain any given goal is tantamount to desecration of the memory of the victims whose ashes are scattered here. The truth about the Holocaust must not die. The memory of Auschwitz must last so that such Extermination is never repeated again.

Once again thank You, Honourable Survivors, for Your testimony and for Your presence here today.

May the memory of all the victims of Auschwitz live eternally! May the memory of the victims of the Holocaust live eternally!

Andrzej Duda