

## Ronald Lauder's speech delivered at the state ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising

President Duda, President Herzog, President Steinmeier, President Trzaskowski, Marian Turski, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Marian, we've known each other for forty years. When I first joined you, you were the head of the Jewish Historical Institute. He kept all the records of the Jewish people, alive, and he single-handedly made sure that nothing was lost or was given to the Historical Institute against a great deal of pressure from the Communist Party. I do not represent a country like the other presidents up here today. Instead, I represent 8-million Jewish-people in roughly 100 countries throughout the Diaspora.

But, no matter where they live, this place, the Warsaw Ghetto, and this event – the uprising that took place here 80 years ago – will always be part of the Jewish people.

For me, this is very personal. I am filled with memories. I first came here in the 1970s, more than 50 years ago. Parts of the Ghetto still lay in ruins. I stood where I am standing now. It was at night and there was a full moon, I saw large open spaces. It had just snowed that night. In the shadows, you could see the outlines of where the streets of the Ghetto once were. Even though it was so silent, in my mind I could hear the screams, the machine guns, the explosions – all in an overpowering silence. A silence still haunts me.

The next morning, I went to Mila 18, the headquarters of the Jewish resistance. I stood there, thinking about the leaders of the uprising taking their own lives rather than dying at the hands of the Germans. It reminded me of the Jewish fighters 2,000 years earlier, who took their own lives at Masada, rather than die at the hands of the Romans.

Ever since then, whenever I came back to Warsaw, I would come to Mila 18 and say Kaddish – the Jewish Memorial Prayer – for those brave men and women and all of those who died fighting.

I remember that on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, I met one of the survivors – Marek Edelman – who spoke about his experience in the Warsaw Ghetto. Although I read so much about what happened here, hearing about it from someone who was actually there was different from reading about it.

Recently, a photograph was found in a camera that was discovered nearby. We see a group of Jews being led out of the Ghetto under a stormtrooper's gun. The picture is taken from a window above. You see a young girl – age 4 or 5 – wearing a pretty coat and white hat. She is walking between what must be her mother and father, each holding her hands. We know something they don't know: in the next 48 hours they would all be dead. This picture will break your heart.

One year later – in 1944 – there was one more chapter in Warsaw's struggle that we should all remember. In 1944 the Polish Underground was told to rise up against the Germans in a coordinated battle aided by the great strength of the Red Army, but the Soviets double-crossed them

and held back on purpose. 16,000 Polish-fighters were killed and 200,000 civilians were murdered in mass executions.

President Duda, all of us must focus on what brings us together today. Our shared history, our shared courage and friendship, our common bonds. Let's always remember. All Poles fought the Nazis here, Polish-Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, and one year later, Polish-Catholics in the 1944 Polish Warsaw Uprising. Everyone here today must use these brave young men and women as inspiration when we face our own challenges ahead. Let us draw strength from them. Let us draw courage and let us always remember them. May God bless their memory and God bless all of you.