

The speech of President Andrzej Duda at the 80th Anniversary of the Outbreak of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising ceremony in Warsaw

Honourable Survivors,

Honourable Righteous Among the Nations,

Excellencies, Distinguished Presidents: of the State of Israel and the Federal Republic of Germany,

Distinguished First Ladies

Honourable Prime Minister,

Distinguished Representatives of Polish Authorities headed by Speakers of the Sejm and Senate,

Honourable Ministers from Israel, the Federal Republic of Germany and from Poland,

Parliamentarians,

Clergyman,

Your Eminence, Most Reverend Sir,

Excellencies, Reverend Archbishops and Bishops,

Rabbis, headed by the Chief Rabbi of Poland,

All Distinguished Guests,

Dear Hosts,

Representatives of Warsaw municipal authorities, headed by the Mayor of the capital city of Warsaw,

Dear young people from Poland and Israel,

Ladies and Gentlemen!

Twice in the Second World War Warsaw rose up in arms. It was during the occupation. When the defence of Warsaw failed in 1939, when neither the Polish Army nor the inhabitants of Warsaw managed to defend the city. When the Germans came. And as much as they occupied the lion's share of what was then the Republic of Poland, they also captured the capital. Then Poland completely collapsed under the additional blows of Soviet rifle butts and their bullets, as they wiped it off the map, incorporated part of it into the German Reich and made the other part the territory of the General Government and the Soviet state.

The then Republic of Poland was different from the one we know today, the one we inhabit today. That republic was a commonwealth of many nations. Warsaw was already a great metropolis, the largest in Poland. It also had the second largest concentration of Jews after New York. Almost 350 thousand Polish citizens of Jewish nationality lived here in the Polish capital. At that time it was a state in which Jewish community along with Poles, but also with other nationalities, lived on the same soil for almost one thousand years, one could say: under one roof. Throughout different epochs in history but staying together.

That history of the one thousand years is well documented by the Polin Museum on whose premises we are right now. In the stretch of one thousand years' history, the year in 1939 came as an absolute breakthrough. It brought about collapse of those relations. The German Nazis came. They destroyed the Republic of Poland not only in political and state terms, but also in social terms, creating a most traumatic intersection of society and enslaving everyone; but among the enslaved they branded and singled out those who belonged to the Jewish nation. The Polish Jews. Those who lived here, what attended schools here, spoke the same language, who spoke Polish, who had knowledge of Polish literature, history, who studied here, who worked here, created here, who were artists, actors, university professors, lawyers, doctors, workers, entrepreneurs, shop owners, who made up together that great social fabric. They were singled out, branded, stigmatised. As President Marion Turski has just said, they were branded with hatred, yes, and locked up in ghettos.

Today we are in the district that was turned into a ghetto by the German Nazis, a district with Polish Jews from all Warsaw, and neighbouring suburbs crowded together. Overall the gigantic number of 450,000 people who were crammed into this confined area of several streets. In conditions unimaginable to us today, in atrocious conditions that not only offend all modern standards of living but are also an affront to any human decency.

They were not accorded humane treatment in any sense. From the very beginning, the intention was to murder them, first to exploit them for labour, then to murder them, to annihilate them, to wipe them off the face of the earth, to erase their memory. This is what was done here in a pace gathering momentum as Jews were deported from here to mass extermination camps to Treblinka and Auschwitz. Some of them were murdered here on the spot, starved to death, or plagued by ailments. Finally, as the eyewitnesses of that time and historians tell us, only very few of Polish Jews were left here in the ghetto. About 50 to 55,000, most of them young because they were still needed for work.

The sense of rage was growing. The rage of desperation intensified. By all means, by their own means and with the support of others, including the Polish underground state structures, they collected weapons, paid for them out of their own pockets, bartered them and used other methods to stage a revolt, to rise up in arms

From the recollections of those who survived, who miraculously left the ghetto and lived through the uprising, such as "Kazik," such as Marek Edelman, it is evident: "Honestly, it was not about fighting for survival, it was simply our fight against them. It was our fight for dignity. Primarily for dignified death. The death on my own terms, based on my rules." In fact, the fight for freedom. Unfortunately not the freedom in the sense of liberty, unrestrained life. Rather that for freedom of choice, of determining one's own destiny, one's own fate. But also fight for revenge. To mete out justice for the pain, the suffering, the crimes, the death of the nearest ones. Take a look at the Monument, which was raised here back in 1940's, thereafter, called one of the most poignant monuments of human heroism and suffering in World War II. Suffering, since it is the suffering that is expressed on the reverse side of the Monument. And heroism seen on the faces of the Warsaw Ghetto insurgents and also expressed by those menorahs burning today. Have a look at the corbels supporting them. The menorahs are supported by lions. The symbol of valour. For me – the President of the Republic of Poland – and for us today, for posterity, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising is above all a symbol of bravery, of absolute determination and courage, of the will to

fight for freedom, of the will to determine one's own destiny, and a symbol of extraordinary mad bravery.

You could ask a question today: what was their role model? What was a beacon for them? The answer would be: they had in mind the great Jewish warriors of ancient times, the Maccabees, the heroic defenders of Masada. This is certainly what we are going to hear from the President of the State of Israel who is here, this is what we are going to hear from the Rabbis who are attending the ceremony, as well as the representatives of a Jewish community worldwide, this is what will be said by those who are following the ceremony and listening to us in Israel.

But let me tell you this. They also remembered what they read in schoolbooks about Ordon, who fought for Poland and is described by Mickiewicz as the one who blew up his redoubt because he did not want to surrender. That they would also recall Wołodyjowski depicted by Henryk Sienkiewicz, whose works they knew from the school reading, Wołodyjowski who blew up Kamieniec Podolski, for he did not want to surrender to the enemy the fortress, besieged by Turkish army. They are our common heroes. They are the heroes of Israel, the heroes of the Jews, the heroes of the world and of Poland. Many of them who survived the war, the Ghetto Uprising, were later insurgents in the Warsaw Uprising.

Together with their classmates from the same school banks, they continued to fight against the Nazis, the Germans, the occupiers, they stood for freedom, who gave their lives for freedom, they also stand here for the free Poland. Beforehand, their brothers and fathers fought in the ranks of the Polish army shedding blood for Poland's freedom in 1920 and 1939. In 1920 they defended it against the Soviets and in 1939 against the Germans. Later they founded the state of Israel. They were brothers in arms in the Polish army in the West, in General Anders' army. They formed the core of the Israeli army. It was them, their brothers and cousins who were later elected to the Knesset. They would also contribute to building of Poland – as Marek Edelman did – they struggle for decades to make Poland free again.

It was precisely Marek Edelman, the hero of the Ghetto Uprising, who later became an activist in the Polish anti-communist underground, was the man of Solidarity, member of the Committee for the Defence of Workers, who took part in the fight for a free, sovereign, and independent Poland. He fought here for the freedom of a Polish nation and the Jewish nation in the Second World War in the Ghetto Uprising. He worked here after the Second World War, attending to his patients. He fought here for the regaining of full independence and sovereignty of our state. He died here and is buried here in the cemetery. This is the history of our shared commonwealth.

We bow our heads to the heroes of the Ghetto Uprising, to all those who fought for their freedom and dignity against hatred and Nazism; to the Polish Jews, Polish citizens who never surrendered, never lost their spirit and who to this day remain a glorious example for all of us; in the same way in Israel, to every soldier who defends Israel's borders and to us Poles who stand to defend the borders of the Republic of Poland and to all those who serve in the Polish military. Yes, the Warsaw Ghetto insurgents are an unfading example of valour, heroism, they stand as a symbol of courage, dignity, and valour just as the lions do. The lions supporting these menorahs.

We shall never forget them. I always reiterate: perhaps there would not be freedom if it were not for a single drop of their blood shed in the battle. In combat. Perhaps there would be no victory if it were not for a single gesture of resistance which may be underestimated. We can never forget

the valour and the stance of Polish Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto – the Varsovians and residents of Warsaw suburban areas. Yes, indeed, they were such people. Not only those who stood in arms but also the ones depicted on the reverse side of the Monument here.

For all historians underscore that the resistance put up here in the ghetto, the resistance which came as a surprise to the German Nazis, and which lasted one month, was in fact not only the resistance of those who had arms in their hands. It was also resistance put up by those who clung to the walls not to be dragged out and would rather burn than surrender to the Nazis, the resistance put up by ordinary people: men, women, elderly, and children. They also had their share in valour. One must never to forget it.

Honour and glory to the Heroes!

Glory to the Warsaw Ghetto Insurgents! Eternal memory to those murdered and fallen!

May everyone, here in Poland and in any other corner of the world, remember: each man who sows hatred, who tramples on another man, tramples on the graves of the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, tramples on the graves of the murdered Jews. But in doing so, one tramples also on the graves of all who were coming to aid to the persecuted and to those threatened with death. Also treading on the graves of the Righteous Among the Nations from my country, Poland, and from all other countries of the world – all people who sought to help Jews, all people who were and are providing help to other victims of persecution, all people who perish, who are murdered because of this effort.

Honour and glory to the Heroes! Eternal memory those murdered and fallen!