

BEFORE THE
EDUCATION COMMITTEE
CONNECTICUT GENERAL ASSEMBLY

S. B. No. 452 – Holocaust and Genocide Education and Awareness

Statement of Charles Chotkowski

My name is Charles Chotkowski, and I am a resident of Fairfield. I am the Director of Research for the Holocaust Documentation Committee of the Polish American Congress, and I submit this statement on its behalf. For information only, I am also active in the following organizations (which are not involved in this statement): Member (and former Chair) of the Holocaust Commemoration Committee of the Town of Fairfield; Member of the Advisory Board of the Polish Studies Program at Central Connecticut State University; and Fellow of the Piast Institute for Polish and Polish American Studies (Michigan).

I generally support the enactment of Senate Bill No. 452, providing for the inclusion of Holocaust and Genocide education and awareness in the social studies curriculum in the public schools. My particular concern is that the curriculum should include the experience of Poland and the Poles under German occupation. Just as education on the Holocaust will combat anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial, so education on the Nazi persecution of Poland and the Poles will combat anti-Polish prejudices and stereotypes based on ignorance of the Polish experience in World War II.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum outlines the scope of Holocaust remembrance in its suggested Days of Remembrance proclamation for mayors as follows:

Whereas, the Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945—six million were murdered; Roma (Gypsies), people with disabilities, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons; and millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents, also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny...¹

Some historical background: World War II began with the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939. After a month-long campaign, the last Polish army in the field surrendered and the Polish government left the country. A government-in-exile, the only legitimate Polish

authority, was established, first in France, and then in London. There was no collaborationist government in Poland like the Vichy regime in France, and no collaborationist leader like Vidkun Quisling in Norway. There were no fascist groups like the Iron Guard in Romania or the Arrow Cross in Hungary. On the contrary, Poland had one of the largest underground resistance movements in Europe, both military (the Home Army) and civilian, and relatively little collaboration with the Germans. There was also an underground organization, Zegota, which was dedicated to rescuing Jews, an activity for which the Germans imposed the death penalty.

The Germans imposed on occupied Poland a tyranny that was far harsher than their rule in Denmark or France. In addition to the murder of 3 million Polish Jews, the Germans were also responsible for the deaths of 2 to 3 million non-Jewish Poles. Other Poles were conscripted as forced laborers and sent to Germany. The Germans did not recruit ethnic Poles as SS-auxiliaries or concentration or death camp guards: the only role Poles played in those camps was as prisoners and victims.

There have been longstanding objections, which far antedate the present government of the Law and Justice party, in Poland and among Polish Americans, to the phrase “Polish Death Camps,” which suggests a collective Polish guilt for those camps. In fact the camps were established and administered by Germans, and staffed by German, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian—but not Polish—guards.

More appalling still are such calumnies as “The Poles were worse than the Nazis” and “The Germans put the death camps in Poland because the Poles would be happy to see the Jews killed.” The prominent Holocaust scholar Deborah Lipstadt has dismissed the first canard as “absurd” and “an enduring myth” and the second as “balderdash”ⁱⁱ

Some blame the Poles collectively for the crimes of the few among them who did collaborate in the persecution of Jews. During the war some Poles rescued Jews, others betrayed them, but the vast majority of Poles did neither, they simply tried to survive the German reign of terror as best they could. They were innocent bystanders who could not have stopped Nazi crimes, not guilty bystanders as some would have it.

Two Israeli political scientists, Efraim Podoksik and Michael Kochin, write in *The Jerusalem Post* that “It is repugnant to assign to an entire people the collective moral responsibility for the crimes of individuals committed without legitimate authority, Such reassignment of blame serves only those who wish to blur the distinction between the guilty and innocent, and thus taint the latter because of crimes of the former.”ⁱⁱⁱ

It is ignorance of the facts that encourages belief in the anti-Polish calumnies outlined above. Unfortunately, efforts to set the record straight are denounced as a “whitewash” by some who are more interested in denigrating Poland than in historical accuracy. That is why acknowledgement in just measure of Nazi persecutions in Poland of the Poles is so important.

Respectfully submitted,

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ⁱ <https://www.ushmm.org/m/pdfs/proclamations-for-mayors-DOR2018.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <http://lipstadt.blogspot.com/2007/10/enduring-myth-poles-were-worse-than.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ “For Poland’s and our truth,” *The Jerusalem Post*, February 9, 2018