

'Poland won't enforce Holocaust law in near future'

At Knesset panel, Polish envoy says country will examine legislation's components with Israel

• By LAHAV HARKOV

The controversial law outlawing public discussion of Poles' collaboration with the Nazis will not be enforced in the near future, Polish Ambassador to Israel Jacek Chodorowicz told the Knesset Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Committee on Monday.

"The Polish Justice Ministry committed to not enforcing the new law before there is an in-depth examination of all of its components, including a discussion with Israeli representatives," Chodorowicz said.

The ambassador acknowledged that for the past month, Poland and Israel have been "in the eye of the storm," but said the two countries have agreed to discuss the matter.

"We will talk about the subject more quietly and peacefully. Too much has been said that was criticized by Israelis," he stated.

Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Committee chairman Avraham Neguise (Likud) called for the law to be canceled immediately, and said the Foreign Ministry needs to take steps to fight Holocaust denial.

Yisrael Beytenu MK Yulia Malinovskii said, "You can legislate whatever you want, but no one can change history. We appreciate those who helped and saved Jewish lives, but there were also people who participated in the Jewish genocide, and no one has a right to say anything else. It pains me... that there are many who can no longer tell the story of what happened to them."

Chodorowicz spoke at a discussion on preserving World War II sites, an issue of concern to Soviet-born MKs who called the meeting.

At least one Red Army veteran was in attendance, wearing his war medals affixed to his suit jacket.

The lawmakers and veterans took issue with a Polish law that allows the government to take down Soviet-era monuments.

"It's revenge for the sake of revenge," Zionist Union MK Ksenia Svetlova lamented. "These are monuments for the Red Army that liberated Poland; it shouldn't matter who built them. I'm proud of every person who contributed to the victory over the Nazis," she said.

Svetlova also said that while the government is not touching Red Army graves, it turns a blind eye to those who desecrate them.

Neguise said the discussion is taking place on the background of increased antisemitism and Holocaust denial in Europe.



POLISH AMBASSADOR Jacek Chodorowicz meets with the Knesset Immigration, Absorption and Diaspora Committee yesterday. (Marc Israel Sellem/The Jerusalem Post)

"It's important to prevent any violation of the memory of the Holocaust and those murdered in it, and we must preserve its memory in Israel and the world," Neguise said. "It's important to learn about the contribution of the Red Army to the victory over the Nazi beast and the allies' contribution to that goal."

Yesh Atid MK Yoel Razbozov accused Poland of trying to "change historic facts and allow the gravestones of Red Army soldiers to be desecrated."

Chodorowicz promised that since Poland declared its independence, no Red Army graves have been moved.

"What changed in the new law gives an opportunity for the authorities to dismantle symbolic sites that are identified with the communist regime that ruled Poland after the war and were built in the 1950s and 60s. It's very different," he stated.

In a related event, Svetlova and United Torah Judaism MK Uri Maklev launched a Knesset Caucus for Preserving Jewish Sites and Cemeteries Abroad. The meeting was held to discuss the desecration and misuse of Jewish burial sites in Europe.

"There are no disputes on this issue. We all see eye-to-eye and want to help," Maklev said. "As the years pass, the worse the problem gets... In many places, there are no longer Jewish people there to protect Jewish sites."

Paul Packer, chairman of the US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad (CPAHA) and the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs signed an agreement on Monday to cooperate on joint ventures aimed at bringing thousands of Jewish volunteers from around the world to preserve Jewish cemeteries and synagogues in Europe.

"I didn't know what to expect in the Knesset and I'm shocked. Good for you," Packer said. "What I love about Israel is they talk about the future and pride themselves on helping the world. A strong America means a strong Israel, and a strong Israel means a strong Jewish people. America is here for you."

The discussion was held in conjunction with the European Jewish Cemeteries Initiative (ESJF) and was backed by the US and German governments as well as private donors. It was founded by Rabbi Isaac Schapira, son of a former UTJ leader who was knighted by Britain's Queen Elizabeth in 2014. Former justice minister Yossi Beilin has also taken an active part in the organization's work, helping it connect with foreign governments.

The ESJF's central goal is to build fences around as many Jewish cemeteries as possible in Eastern and Central Europe. The group has built 102 fences since its founding in 2015 and has found a total of 1200 relevant locations.

Some sites, however, have been



US AMBASSADOR David Friedman (center) witnesses the joint preservation agreement signing by CPAHA chairman Paul Packer (left) and Diaspora Affairs Ministry director-general Dvir Kahana in Tel Aviv on Monday. (Courtesy)

US, Israel sign agreement to up joint preservation of Jewish sites in Europe

• Jerusalem Post Staff

The US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad (CPAHA) and the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs signed an agreement on Monday to cooperate on joint ventures aimed at bringing thousands of Jewish volunteers from around the world to preserve Jewish cemeteries and synagogues in Europe.

The agreement was signed in the presence of US Ambassador David Friedman by CPAHA chairman Paul Packer and Dvir Kahana, director general of the Ministry of Diaspora Affairs.

Under the declaration of cooperation, the CPAHA and the ministry agree to work together to preserve the cultural heritage of Israeli and American citizens in Europe, including restoring cemeteries,

monuments and archival material, which were decimated during the Holocaust and decades of communist rule.

The United States and Israel have committed to identifying damaged, deteriorated or obscured sites and related objects of cultural heritage in Eastern and Central Europe, and to work together to preserve those sites through joint projects.

"The relationship between the United States and Israel has never been closer, and we are cooperating at every level and in every sphere," Friedman said. "While diplomatic and security cooperation are often what makes the news headlines, I'm especially proud of this new joint declaration, which unifies our efforts on the preservation of cultural heritage – an issue of extreme importance for millions

of American citizens and Israeli citizens."

Paul Packer, chairman of the commission, said that "the new partnership with the ministry will allow the United States and Israel to strengthen their citizens' heritages – to not only remember and commemorate the past but to make sure the values that our nations were built on will never be forgotten."

Kahana said that the agreement was the first step in the implementation of a program by Mosaic – the government of Israel-Diaspora Jewry partnership – to create a Jewish peace corps.

"This will increase cooperation between Israel... the US and Jews around the world," Kahana said. "This is the first step in bringing tens of thousands of Jewish volunteers to help preserve our joint identity."

plowed over and turned into agricultural land or school grounds.

"In Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, we reach these places and there's no cemetery anymore," ESJF CEO Philip Carmel said. "We want to finish our work before all these places disappear. We think we can do it in 10 years."

Beilin recounted visiting the town of Frampol, in Poland: "We talked to children there and they had no

idea there were ever any Jews. They had never met any Jews... We built access roads and fences around the cemetery and the locals took an interest. Now the school nearby is protecting the cemetery. The children researched and wrote reports on the Jews of Frampol. They sang to us [in Hebrew]," he said.

"This project is more than just a cemetery. The unexpected results are

bigger than the project itself. Without it, the contribution of Jews to the development of Eastern Europe will simply disappear," Beilin added.

Chodorowicz, who also attended the caucus launch, said the Polish Ministry of Culture decided last year to create a database of all cemeteries in the country and create "unified and dignified" ways to mark them.

So-called 'Polokaust' museum won't be built, says Polish minister

WARSAW (Reuters) – Poland's deputy culture minister backed away on Monday from an academic's proposal to build a so-called "Polokaust" museum for Polish victims of the Nazis, at a time when Warsaw faces international pressure over a law imposing jail terms for suggesting Polish complicity in the Holocaust.

Poland's nationalist ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) said its measure passed this month – which imposes jail sentences of up to three years for those who suggest Poland was complicit in Nazi crimes – is needed to protect the honor of the nation.

Marek Kochan, a writer and academic, coined the term "Polokaust" earlier this month to suggest that Poles were similar targets of Nazi crimes as Jews, and said a museum should

quickly be built to commemorate them. Last week, Deputy Culture Minister Jaroslaw Sellin backed the proposal.

However, the idea drew criticism, including from the dean of the university where Kochan teaches, who called it harmful. On Monday, Sellin backed off, saying the idea would antagonize Jews.

"It is a complete misunderstanding," Sellin told the *Rzeczpospolita* newspaper when he was asked if he wanted the museum to be built.

"Using the concept of 'Polokaust' in a way I understand it would hurt Jewish sensitivity and unnecessarily provoke more tension between our nations. The 'Polokaust museum' will not be built," he also said.

Israel and the United States



JAROSLAW SELLIN (Wikimedia Commons)

have spoken out forcefully against Poland's Holocaust law, saying it could criminalize truthful scholarship about the role some Poles played in German crimes. Opponents accuse the PiS of politicizing World War Two to build a nationalist sense of grievance

among the population.

More than 90% of the 3.2 million Jews who lived in pre-war Poland were murdered by the Nazis during their occupation of the country, accounting for about half of all Jews killed in the Holocaust. Jews from other parts of Europe were sent to be murdered at death camps built and operated by Germans in Poland, such as Auschwitz and Treblinka.

The Nazis also killed 1.9 million non-Jewish Polish citizens, although there was never a plan to exterminate all of them, as there was for the Jews.

Sellin said that the law – which imposes jail terms for suggesting Poland was complicit in the Holocaust – will not be used until and unless the Constitutional Tribunal determines it is compatible

with the constitution.

The head of the Constitutional Tribunal, Julia Przylebska, has been appointed by the PiS. The European Union accuses Poland's ruling party of breaching the rule of law to impose control over the judiciary.

Many Poles believe their nation behaved honorably for the most part during the Holocaust. But research published since 1989 has sparked a painful debate about responsibility and reconciliation.

A 2000-2004 inquiry by Poland's state Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) found that on July 10, 1941, Nazi occupiers and local inhabitants colluded in a massacre of at least 340 Jews at Jedwabne.

Some victims were locked inside a barn where they were then burned to death.

The revelation disturbed the belief by many Poles that their country was fundamentally a victim during the war in which a fifth of the nation perished. Some Poles still refuse to acknowledge the IPN's findings.

Elite IDF troops to get new uniforms

Army has also been revamping uniforms of regular combat soldiers

• By ANNA AHRONHEIM

Troops in the IDF's elite units will be receiving new combat uniforms in the coming months, the army has announced.

The uniform is being given to the troops as part of a broad process to improve ground warfare, the statement announced, adding that "the uniform will improve the effectiveness as well as the operational performance of the soldier over time and will help strengthen the survivability of the forces."

It will be specialized to each soldier's unique combat equipment characteristics and will have a rigid, fireproof and sweat-proof fabric. It will also provide built-in protection layer for the soldiers' knees and is designed ergonomically to prevent pressure to certain points on the body.

The IDF has begun revamping uniforms and gear of regular combat soldiers at a significant cost in order for it to be more convenient for infantry soldiers on the battlefield.

The new uniforms, which are lightweight and more durable in harsh terrain, will be given to combat soldiers for operational missions and not for training or routine operations.

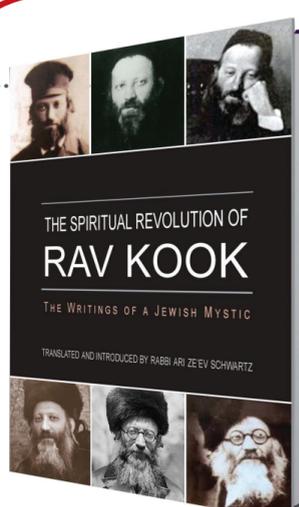
Infantry soldiers will also be equipped with new modern tactical vests with an attachable backpack, a helmet that gives better protection and a shape-camouflaging helmet cover, knee guards that bend according to the movement of the soldier as well as a headlamp designed for urban and tunnel warfare.

Changes are also being made to the equipment of female combat soldiers. This includes replacing the heavy Tavor assault rifles for lighter M-16 rifles,



A SOLDIER poses in a refashioned uniform. (IDF)

smaller kneepads, helmets and armored vests, which will fit women's bodies better.





The Spiritual Revolution of Rav Kook

The Writings of a Jewish Mystic

• By Rabbi Ari Ze'ev Schwartz

“Rabbi Schwartz should be congratulated for his important book, which opens the door to the profound thoughts of Rav Kook on such a diverse range of topics. I am certain that this book will be a great blessing to any serious student who speaks English”.

–Rabbi Shlomo Aviner, Rosh Yeshiva, Ateret Yerushalayim; Rabbi of Beit El

PB | 270 pp | 9789652299130 | \$21.95 | 98 NIS

GEFEN PUBLISHING HOUSE
www.gefenpublishing.com | orders@gefenpublishing.com
 6 Hatzvi St. Jerusalem 94386, Israel | Tel: 02-538-0247 | Fax: 02-538-8423
 Look for us on   

Available at Amazon, Steimatzky, Pomeranz, selected bookstores and also delivery from our NJ warehouse