

**Opening Remarks by the Honorable Warren L. Miller
Chairman, U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad
at the Signing Ceremony for the Agreement Between the United States of America and the
Republic of Poland on the Protection of Certain Cultural Properties
May 11, 2004 * Washington, DC**

Welcome to all present, especially those who have come from Poland and elsewhere.

Secretary Armitage, we are honored by your presence, which signifies the importance that you and Secretary Powell place on these issues. Ambassador Grudzinski, congratulations, your hard work and commitment made today's agreement a reality. We also have with us Ambassadors Daniel Ayalon of the State of Israel and Jaime Daremblum of the Republic of Costa Rica. The importance of this Agreement to the Jewish people makes Ambassador Ayalon's presence especially significant. Danny, thank you for rearranging your schedule to be here. Ambassador Daremblum's family was from Poland and he worked with the Commission I chair to restore the cemetery and Holocaust memorial where his ancestors are buried.

We are also honored by the presence of a number of other distinguished individuals. Among them are: Director of the President's Office of Management and Budget and Member of the Cabinet Josh Bolten; Assistant Secretary of State Beth Jones, Deputy Assistant to the President Kristen Silverberg; Ambassador Daniel Fried, Damon Wilson, and other directors from the National Security Council; Deputy Secretary of the Cabinet Tevi Troy; Special Assistants to the President Monica Kladaakis and Eric Motley; Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Heather Conley; and James Langdon, a member of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. Unfortunately, Special Envoy for Holocaust Issues Ed O'Donnell had to leave town at the last minute. Also present are the former Chairman of the House International Relations Committee, Ben Gilman; former Congressman and Deputy Chief of Staff to former President Bush, Henson Moore; former Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Stuart Eizenstat; Senator John Warner's Chief of Staff Susan McGill; the Chief Rabbi of Warsaw, Michael Schudrich; Chairman of the World Zionist Organization, Kalman Sultanik; the Publisher and CEO of the Washington Post Co., Bo Jones; and senior officials of the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith, the Anti-Defamation League, the Polish American Congress, and other organizations. Last, but certainly not least, are the fellow Members of the Commission that I chair.

Thank you all for coming.

We will now proceed with signing of the Agreement.

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Mr. Secretary, thank you for those excellent remarks. Today's agreement was made possible by several individuals who played key roles in bringing the negotiations to a successful conclusion. In Warsaw, U.S. Ambassador Christopher Hill's personal involvement and the hard work by Political Counselor Jerry Anderson were crucial. In Washington, the active involvement of Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Heather Conley has been invaluable in helping attain this agreement and in many other sensitive matters. Finally, we are indebted to all those who helped to arrange today's event, especially, Laura Keehner of the White House Staff.

This Agreement commits our governments to protect, assist preservation efforts and prevent discrimination with respect to the cultural sites of ethnic and religious groups. Historic sites, monuments, places of worship, cemeteries and mass graves, and related archival material are encompassed by the Agreement, and a Joint Cultural Heritage Commission is established.

Particular emphasis is placed on the cultural sites of groups that were victims of genocide during World War II. A special situation exists regarding Jewish cultural sites. The Holocaust left few, and in many places, no Jews to take care of these sites because most were murdered or forced to flee. In 1939, Poland was home to 3.3 million Jews. Six years later, most were dead, in addition to hundreds of thousands of non-Polish Jews killed by the Nazis on Polish soil. The Nazis made Poland a place of death for the Jewish people of Europe. They also sought to destroy Poland as a nation, and we must never forget the intense suffering of the Polish people.

After the Holocaust, the communists continued repression of religious groups. Many Jewish sites were destroyed, others were left to deteriorate and then disappear. Today, only a few thousand Jews live in Poland.

The efforts of our governments, working together as partners with the private sector, are needed to ensure that the remnants of a great culture survive in a country from which a majority of American Jews trace their heritage.

The Agreement we have signed is one of a number of similar agreements that have been entered into with different governments since the Commission was established in 1985. I am pleased to note that most have been entered into during the past three years. This accomplishment is directly linked to the unprecedented support that we have received from President Bush. The Administration has placed a priority on obtaining these agreements because of the President's emphasis on Holocaust remembrance and combating anti-Semitism. This agreement is part of that effort – recognizing that anti-Semitism often manifests itself through discrimination or attacks against Jewish cultural sites.

The President has repeatedly demonstrated his commitment on these issues. His visit to Auschwitz last year sent a powerful message both here and abroad. In the Oval Office the President asked Lithuania's President to have historic Torah scrolls that were taken in World War II and languished in government repositories returned to the Jewish community. On another occasion he asked Slovakia's President to have property restituted to the Jewish community. Still another time in the Oval Office, he praised Estonia's Prime Minister for demanding the removal of a statue of an SS officer in his country.

Since 1989, when Poland became an independent and democratic nation, its government has encouraged Jewish cemetery and synagogue preservation efforts, helped to stop the desecration of such sites, and has begun to confront the difficult issue of property restitution.

In addition, the sensitive issue of anti-Semitism and Polish-Jewish relations is being confronted in a forthright manner.

An unambiguous message has been delivered by the leaders of the government of Poland to the people of Poland: Anti-Semitism is wrong, it is immoral, and it will not be tolerated. This message is being conveyed in the schools and in public forums, and it is having an impact. President Kwasniewski also led his nation in facing up to and being remorseful for the awful truth that Polish citizens, not the Nazis, burned alive 1,600 of their Jewish neighbors in Jedwabne in 1941. His insistence upon historical truth, deserves recognition and commendation.

I would like to share with you an experience I had that is reflective of the new pluralistic Poland. I was at lunch with a friend of mine who is from Poland and is not Jewish. As we talked about our children, he told me when he was living in Germany, his daughter had befriended a Holocaust survivor. When the family returned to Poland, his daughter told him that she had decided to major in Hebrew at the University in Warsaw. Her father asked her the obvious question, "What will you do with a degree in Hebrew in Poland?", but she was resolute and her father gave her his full support. My lunch companion is here today. He is my good friend, Ambassador Grudzinski. Thank you Shemeck for being the wonderful man you are.

While significant progress has been made in Poland to create an open society, the challenge of defeating the evil of anti-Semitism remains. The United States looks forward to continuing to work together with the government of Poland and fully supports its efforts to eliminate harmful stereotypes, prejudice, and the distrust that arises from the lack of knowledge of one another's cultures.

On behalf of the government of the United States, and on behalf of those whose voices cannot be heard, we thank the Government of Poland for truthfully remembering what happened during the Holocaust and for agreeing to protect the memory and the culture of those who perished.

Thank you.