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James B. Comey, Director
Federal Bureau of Investigation
FBI Headquarters
935 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington D.C. 20535-0001

April 19, 2015

Dear Director Comey,

We write concerning your published remarks at the Holocaust Memorial Museum on April 16, 2015, and ask that you accept this response in the spirit with which it is written.

That is, with a deep appreciation of the work that the FBI does every day to protect the citizens of this country. That responsibility is a heavy one that you and the organization that you lead fulfill admirably with a high degree of skill, professionalism, and courage.

Our focus today is on a different responsibility. One that is not unique to the FBI but, rather is shared by every citizen and every organization in a free society. This is the responsibility to know, and tell others about, history. Because history, being “our story,” not only describes what was. It also largely determines what is, and often influences what will be.

You state in your published remarks, that “*the murderers and accomplices of Germany, and Poland, and Hungary . . . convinced themselves that [the Holocaust] was the right thing to do, the thing they had to do. That’s what people do. And that should truly frighten us.*” Respectfully, we feel that naming Poland as, in effect, an “accomplice” to the Holocaust was patently incorrect and, therefore, irresponsible.

Simply stated, German aggression in Poland during World War II was Nazism unbridled in its purest, most murderous form. Their purpose was to shatter a newly reconstituted Polish nation and destroy a then heterogeneous and, at times, internally divided, Polish society.

The gruesome statistics are well known. During five years (1939 through 1944) of Nazi occupation some six million Poles were exterminated – 3 million Polish Catholics and another 3 million Polish Jews. Slave labor was endemic, as was the organized kidnappings of Aryan looking Poles. Random civilian round-ups, daily civilian executions, and systematic, purposeful starvation were the daily circumstances of Polish life during this period. As was the relentless extermination of Polish intellectuals, politicians, and

cultural figures by a brutal police state that routinely incarcerated, and executed, Polish high school students for the crime of finishing high school.

No one who has not lived through the Nazi occupation can meaningfully grasp the reality of that brutalization or the hopelessness of a country militarily defeated and, even worse, abandoned by its allies to industrialized murderers. It is therefore beyond anyone's ability to vouch for the behavior of every single Pole who lived through that time.

It does bear mention, though, that Poland's historical experience – characterized by the gobbling up of Poland by the German, Russian, and the Austro-Hungarian Empires for 123 years (from 1795 to 1918), the resulting Diaspora of Poles throughout the world, and the abandonment of Poles by the West during and after World War II – is more similar to the Jewish experience than those of any other European nation.

We ask that you revise your published comments to reflect these facts. In Poland there was no collaborationist government, no organized fascist militia, and no Polish military formations fighting with Nazi Germany. To the contrary - Poles were singled out as a subhuman population of slave labor by Nazi eugenicists.


A relatively small number of the 35,000,000 Poles in pre-war Poland undoubtedly acted shamefully during the five year catastrophe inflicted on Poland during World War II. But the only accurate metric of Poland as a nation is the basic dignity exhibited by the huge majority of Poles in the face of the most murderous tragedy that humanity has ever experienced.

The Polish nation – from its forlorn military struggles during the earliest days of World War II to the battles of Britain and Monte Cassino, Katyn, the exploits of Anders Army, a sustained resistance by one of occupied Europe's largest undergrounds (culminating in the Warsaw Uprising), Operation Market Garden, and the martyrs of Yad Vashem- is rightfully proud of its contribution to world freedom during World War II.

Poland was not an accomplice. Poland was a victim. And, ultimately – at an unprecedented human cost – Poland was also a victor.

Sincerely,

Bozena Leven



Executive Director, PIASA
(on behalf of the PIASA Board)