

Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Washington D.C.

Ambassador Ryszard Schnepf's Remarks at Press Conference Presenting the Museum of the History of Polish Jews Oct. 23, 2012 New York

Honorable Host, Minister Zdrojewski,

Distinguished Guests, Generous Donors, Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends:

After Minister Zdrojewski's timely and excellent remarks, there doesn't seem to be much left for me to say about the importance the Polish Government attaches to this Museum. I am confident, however, that the experts you will hear from today will shed some timely and interesting insight about the Museum's exhibition and how it be so unique.

I do want to join everyone who has spoken already in expressing my words of gratitude to the main sponsors of the Museum and today's event. We are extremely happy that the largest individual financial donation for the Museum was made by Poland's most successful businessman, Dr. Jan Kulczyk. It's a sign of the times when such a generous contribution comes from Poland - yesterday perceived as closed and deprived and, today an emergent and friendly country.

We already know how important the project is for our relations with the American Jewish community. Joining forces during years of working out the noble idea for the Museum taught us mutual respect and allowed to know one another better. So please permit me to shed some light on one very important aspect of this project that I consider indispensable. We regard the Museum as a symbol of the spirit that has guided Poland's political transformation after 1989 – its openness, respect for truth, and return of historical memories that were for many years presented as lies or missing from our history pages will surely refill those empty pages of our history books now. We discovered our bright and glorious moments but are also accepting responsibility for the dark chapters in our past, believing this is the best testimony as to how important it is to be a modern and conscious society.

Only after 1989, in a newly regained atmosphere of freedom and openness, was the world able to witness one thousand years of common Polish-Jewish history and how we lived alongside one another in good and difficult times.

For many years there has been a great revival of Jewish culture and re-discovery of Jewish heritage in Poland. What's most important – all the numerous projects and festivals are well attended by people from not only all walks of Polish life, but also from the world.

A year ago in Warsaw, together with Zygmunt Rolat and Gołda Tencer, I attended concerts during the Singer Festival – a very popular annual event that is growing bigger and bigger each year. In the audience, I saw mainly young faces of people who could not possibly know but were clearly interested in learning about the Jewish part of Polish history.

Because Jewish culture is continuing to thrive in Poland, I find it extremely important that the Museum serve not only as the testimony of the past, but also as an active cultural and educational center, with exhibitions, workshop areas for children and youth, a multi-use auditorium for 450 people, a resource center concentrated on the history and culture of Polish Jews, a youth club, restaurant and café.

The past twenty years have also provided a forum for many of us in Poland to address the full account of Poland's history, culture and our collective struggle for freedom, in which the Polish-Jewish community also played an important role. As an Ambassador to a country where about 70% of the Jewish population claims to have its roots in Poland, I regard outreach to this community as an important part of my mission.

Poland is not only a depository of the memories of the most tragic events in the history of Jewish people. We are also a vibrant place of Jewish cultural revival and the Museum is a perfect answer to a significant and authentic interest in this part of our history.

I hope that many of you will consider visiting Poland for the grand opening of the Museum and will spread the word to others, encouraging them to visit it as well when touring our beautiful country.

Thank you very much.