

REPUBLIC OF POLAND

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

THE MASS EXTERMINATION
of JEWS in
GERMAN OCCUPIED POLAND

NOTE

addressed to the Governments of the
United Nations on December 10th, 1942,
and other documents



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LONDON,
December 10th, 1942

Your Excellency,

On several occasions the Polish Government have drawn the attention of the civilised world, both in diplomatic documents and official publications, to the conduct of the German Government and of the German authorities of occupation, both military and civilian, and to the methods employed by them "in order to reduce the population to virtual slavery and ultimately to exterminate the Polish nation". These methods, first introduced in Poland, were subsequently, applied in a varying degree, in other countries occupied by the armed forces of the German Reich.

2. At the Conference held at St. James's Palace on January 18th, 1942, the Governments of the occupied countries "placed among their principal war aims the punishment, through the channel of organised justice, of those guilty of, or responsible for, those crimes, whether they have ordered them, perpetrated them, or participated in them".

Despite this solemn warning and the declarations of President Roosevelt, of the Prime Minister, Mr. Winston Churchill, and of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, M. Molotov, the German Government has not ceased to apply its methods of violence and terror. The Polish Government have received numerous reports from Poland testifying to the constant intensification of German persecution of the subjected populations.

3. Most recent reports present a horrifying picture of the position to which the Jews in Poland have been reduced. The new methods of mass slaughter applied during the last few months confirm the fact that the German authorities aim with systematic deliberation at the total extermination of the Jewish population of Poland and of the many thousands of Jews whom the German authorities have deported to Poland from Western and Central European countries and from the German Reich itself.

The Polish Government consider it their duty to bring to the knowledge of the Governments of all civilised countries the following fully authenticated information received from Poland during recent weeks, which indicates all too plainly

the new methods of extermination adopted by the German authorities.

4. The initial steps leading to the present policy of extermination of the Jews were taken already in October, 1940, when the German authorities established the Warsaw ghetto. At that time all the Jewish inhabitants of the Capital were ordered to move into the Jewish quarter assigned to them not later than November 1st, 1940, while all the non-Jews domiciled within the new boundaries of what was to become the ghetto were ordered to move out of that quarter. The Jews were allowed to take only personal effects with them, while all their remaining property was confiscated. All Jewish shops and businesses outside the new ghetto boundaries were closed down and sealed. The original date for these transfers was subsequently postponed to November 15th, 1940. After that date the ghetto was completely closed and its entire area was surrounded by a brick wall, the right of entry and exit being restricted to the holders of special passes, issued by the German authorities. All those who left the ghetto without such a pass became liable to sentence of death, and it is known that German courts passed such sentences in a large number of cases.

5. After the isolation of the ghetto, official intercourse with the outside world was maintained through a special German office known as "Transferstelle". Owing to totally inadequate supplies of food for the inhabitants of the ghetto, smuggling on a large scale was carried on; the Germans themselves participated in this illicit trading, drawing considerable incomes from profits and bribes. The food rations for the inhabitants of the ghetto amounted to about a pound of bread per person weekly, with practically nothing else. As a result, prices in the ghetto were on an average ten times higher than outside, and mortality due to exhaustion, starvation and disease, particularly during the last two winters, increased on an unprecedented scale. During the winter 1941-1942 the death rate, calculated on an annual base, has risen to 18 per cent., and during the first quarter of 1942 increased still further. Scores of corpses were found in the streets of the ghetto every day.

6. At the time when the ghetto was established the whole population was officially stated to amount to 488,000,

and in spite of the appalling death rate it was being maintained at this figure by the importation of Jews from Germany and from the occupied countries, as well as from other parts of Poland.

7. The outbreak of war between Germany and Soviet Russia and the occupation of the Eastern areas of Poland by German troops considerably increased the numbers of Jews in Germany's power. At the same time the mass murders of Jews reached such dimensions that, at first, people refused to give credence to the reports reaching Warsaw from the Eastern provinces. The reports, however, were confirmed again and again by reliable witnesses. During the winter 1941-1942 several tens of thousands of Jews were murdered. In the city of Wilno over 50,000 Jews were reported to have been massacred and only 12,000 of them remain in the local ghetto. In the city of Lwow 40,000 were reported murdered; in Rowne 14,000; in Kowel 10,000, and unknown numbers in Stanislawow, Tarnopol, Stryj, Drohobycz and many other smaller towns. At first the executions were carried out by shooting; subsequently, however, it is reported that the Germans applied new methods, such as poison gas, by means of which the Jewish population was exterminated in Chelm, or electrocution, for which a camp was organised in Belzec, where in the course of March and April, 1942, the Jews from the provinces of Lublin, Lwow and Kielce, amounting to tens of thousands, were exterminated. Of Lublin's 80,000 Jewish inhabitants only 2,500 still survive in the city.

8. It has been reliably reported that on the occasion of his visit to the General Gouvernement of Poland in March, 1942, Himmler issued an order for the extermination of 50 per cent. of the Jews in Poland by the end of that year. After Himmler's departure the Germans spread the rumour that the Warsaw ghetto would be liquidated as from April, 1942. This date was subsequently altered to June. Himmler's second visit to Warsaw in the middle of July, 1942, became the signal for the commencement of the process of liquidation, the horror of which surpasses anything known in the annals of history.

9. The liquidation of the ghetto was preceded, on July 17th, 1942, by the registration of all foreign Jews confined there

who were then removed to the Pawiak prison. As from July 20th, 1942, the guarding of the ghetto was entrusted to special security battalions, formed from the scum of several Eastern European countries, while large forces of German police armed with machine guns and commanded by SS. officers were posted at all the gates leading into the ghetto. Mobile German police detachments patrolled all the boundaries of the ghetto day and night.

10. On July 31st, at 11 a.m., German police cars drove up to the building of the Jewish Council of the ghetto, in Grzybowska Street. The SS. officers ordered the chairman of the Jewish Council, Mr. Czerniakow, to summon the members of the Council, who were all arrested on arrival and removed in police cars to the Pawiak prison. After a few hours' detention the majority of them were allowed to return to the ghetto. About the same time flying squads of German police entered the ghetto, breaking into the houses in search of Jewish intellectuals. The better dressed Jews found were killed on the spot, without the police troubling even to identify them. Among those who were thus killed was a non-Jew, Professor Dr. Raszeja, who was visiting the ghetto in the course of his medical duties and was in possession of an official pass. Hundreds of educated Jews were killed in this way.

11. On the morning of the following day, July 22nd, 1942, the German police again visited the office of the Jewish Council and summoned all the members, who had been released from the Pawiak prison the previous day. On their assembly they were informed that an order had been issued for the removal of the entire Jewish population of the Warsaw ghetto and printed instructions to that effect were issued in the form of posters, the contents of which are reproduced in Annex. 1 to this Note. Additional instructions were issued verbally. The number of people to be removed was first fixed at 6,000 daily. The persons concerned were to assemble in the hospital wards and grounds in Stawki Street, the patients of which were evacuated forthwith. The hospital was close to the railway siding. Persons subject to deportation were to be delivered by the Jewish police not later than 4 p.m. each day. Members of the Council and other hostages were to answer for the strict fulfilment of the order.

In conformity with German orders, all inmates of Jewish prisons, old-age pensioners and inmates of other charitable institutions were to be included in the first contingent.

12. On July 28rd, 1942, at 7 p.m., two German police officers again visited the offices of the Jewish Council and saw the chairman, Mr. Czerniakow. After they left him he committed suicide. It is reported that Mr. Czerniakow did so because the Germans increased the contingent of the first day to 10,000 persons, to be followed by 7,000 persons on each subsequent day. Mr. Czerniakow was succeeded in his office by Mr. Lichtenbaum, and on the following day 10,000 persons were actually assembled for deportation, followed by 7,000 persons on each subsequent day. The people affected were either rounded up haphazardly in the streets or were taken from their homes.

18. According to the German order of July 22nd, 1942, all Jews employed in German-owned undertakings, together with their families, were to be exempt from deportation. This produced acute competition among the inhabitants of the ghetto to secure employment in such undertakings, or, failing employment, bogus certificates to that effect. Large sums of money, running into thousands of Zlotys, were being paid for such certificates to the German owners. They did not, however, save the purchasers from deportation, which was being carried out without discrimination or identification.

14. The actual process of deportation was carried out with appalling brutality. At the appointed hour on each day the German police cordoned off a block of houses selected for clearance, entered the back yard and fired their guns at random, as a signal for all to leave their homes and assemble in the yard. Anyone attempting to escape or to hide was killed on the spot. No attempt was made by the Germans to keep families together. Wives were torn from their husbands and children from their parents. Those who appeared frail or infirm were carried straight to the Jewish cemetery to be killed and buried there. On the average 50-100 people were disposed of in this way daily. After the contingent was assembled, the people were packed forcibly into cattle trucks to the number of 120 in each truck, which had room for forty. The trucks were then locked and

sealed. The Jews were suffocating for lack of air. The floors of the trucks were covered with quicklime and chlorine. As far as is known, the trains were despatched to three localities—Tremblinka, Belzec and Sobibor, to what the reports describe as “Extermination camps.” The very method of transport was deliberately calculated to cause the largest possible number of casualties among the condemned Jews. It is reported that on arrival in camp the survivors were stripped naked and killed by various means, including poison gas and electrocution. The dead were interred in mass graves dug by machinery.

15. According to all available information, of the 250,000 Jews deported from the Warsaw ghetto up to September 1st, 1942, only two small transports, numbering about 4,000 people, are known to have been sent eastwards in the direction of Brest-Litovsk and Malachowicze, allegedly to be employed on work behind the front line. It has not been possible to ascertain whether any of the other Jews deported from the Warsaw ghetto still survive, and it must be feared that they have been all put to death.

16. The Jews deported from the Warsaw ghetto so far included in the first instance all the aged and infirm; a number of the physically strong have escaped so far, because of their utility as labour power. All the children from Jewish schools, orphanages and children's homes were deported, including those from the orphanage in charge of the celebrated educationist, Dr. Janusz Korczak, who refused to abandon his charges, although he was given the alternative of remaining behind.

17. According to the most recent reports, 120,000 ration cards were distributed in the Warsaw ghetto for the month of September, 1942, while the report also mentions that only 40,000 such cards were to be distributed for the month of October, 1942. The latter figure is corroborated by information emanating from the German Employment Office (Arbeitsamt), which mentioned the number of 40,000 skilled workmen as those who were to be allowed to remain in a part of the ghetto, confined to barracks and employed on German war production.

18. The deportations from the Warsaw ghetto were interrupted during five days, between August 20th–25th. The

German machinery for the mass slaughter of the Jews was employed during this interval on the liquidation of other ghettos in Central Poland, including the towns of Falenica, Rembertów, Nowy Dwór, Kaluszyn and Minsk Mazowiecki.

19. It is not possible to estimate the exact numbers of Jews who have been exterminated in Poland since the occupation of the country by the armed forces of the German Reich. But all the reports agree that the total number of killed runs into many hundreds of thousands of innocent victims—men, women and children—and that of the 3,180,000 Jews in Poland before the outbreak of war, over a third have perished during the last three years.

20. The Polish population, which itself is suffering the most grievous afflictions, and of which many millions have been either deported to Germany as slave labour or evicted from their homes and lands, deprived of so many of their leaders, who have been cruelly murdered by the Germans, have repeatedly expressed, through the underground organisations, their horror of and compassion with the terrible fate which has befallen their Jewish fellow-countrymen. The Polish Government are in possession of information concerning the assistance which the Polish population is rendering to the Jews. For obvious reasons no details of these activities can be published at present.

21. The Polish Government—as the representatives of the legitimate authority on territories in which the Germans are carrying out the systematic extermination of Polish citizens and of citizens of Jewish origin of many other European countries—consider it their duty to address themselves to the Governments of the United Nations, in the confident belief that they will share their opinion as to the necessity not only of condemning the crimes committed by the Germans and punishing the criminals, but also of finding means offering the hope that Germany might be effectively restrained from continuing to apply her methods of mass extermination.

I avail myself of this opportunity to renew to Your Excellency the assurances of my high consideration.

L. S.

EDWARD RACZYNSKI.