

Ladies and Gentlemen, and especially Those of you who have survived the Gehenna of Auschwitz, all Distinguished Guests,

We are in a place where our civilization collapsed, in a place where the plan to take away man's dignity was systematically put into practise. Where the German Nazi rolled out a genuine "death industry" and a man was reduced to merely a tattooed camp number.

Ten years ago a Shoah survivor, Merka Szewach, noted: "Here they imprisoned my family and they burnt them all. Here they took away my name and gave me a number. I was Merka Szewach no longer, I was a number. "

We are standing in a place which saw a beastly slaughter of over one million people: overwhelmingly Jews from almost all Europe, but also Poles, Roma, Soviet POWs and many, many others... We are standing in a place which reminds us about the vile ideology which undermined the pillars of the world.

Precisely at this hour, 70 years ago the camp was liberated by soldiers of the 60th Army of the First Ukrainian Front of the Red Army. On that day in the afternoon, the 100th Lviv Infantry Division marched into the central part of the camp's premises. Today we think about those soldiers with gratitude and respect.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Auschwitz-Birkenau came as an expression of a cruel contempt of man and of man's dignity. What the oppressors also wanted to annihilate was memory. As Elie Wiesel, another Auschwitz inmate, put it: to kill again, this time by oblivion.

Each of you, Ladies and Gentlemen, the camp Survivors, who were rescued from the pandemonium of hatred and violence, each of you is a custodian of Auschwitz memory. You are the most important participants of the today's ceremony. To be a custodian of Auschwitz memory takes more than to remember the crime itself, it also includes a reflection on the sources of the crime prevailing in people, nations, ideologies and state policies.

It is a memory of totalitarianisms, xenophobia, antisemitism, underpinning the 20th century collapse of our civilization.

In a unique way, the Poles have been made custodians of this tragic memory: for it was occupied Poland that was the object of the two totalitarianisms as they started in parallel carrying out their genocidal plans. In early 1940, the German occupation authorities decided to launch a so called AB Aktion: the destruction of Polish intelligentsia. At the same time, the Soviet authorities made a decision on the mass killing of Polish officers seen as representatives of the Polish elite: the Katyn massacre.

Almost simultaneously, the Germans created, mainly for Polish inmates, a concentration camp in Auschwitz. It was then expanded on a large scale, being transformed into Birkenau extermination camp.

My country was made by the German occupier a place of terror of unprecedented intensity and a place of extermination of European Jews. The German Nazis made Poland a perennial cemetery for Jews and put an end to many centuries' Jewish presence on Polish soil.

This is why it is incumbent on Poland to play to the role of the unique depositor of memory of Auschwitz and the Shoah.

What does memory of Auschwitz mean for us today? First, it is the memory of suffering and the Shoah. It is the memory of a wound, still open and sore. It is also the memory of a cursed place; the place which left a stigma on everyone who approached it.

Yet, the memory of Auschwitz is also a realization that even in the face of the greatest collapse of humanity the highest heroism is possible, or even sanctity. For example, the sanctity of Father Maksymilian Kolbe who sacrificed his life for the life of another inmate.

For in this place, efforts were undertaken not only to destroy the world but also to save it. This is reflected by the words embossed on the medal awarded to the Righteous among the Nations: "Whosoever saves a single life, saves an entire universe". Especially here, we are struck with the profound truth of these words.

Ladies and Gentlemen, for more than 70 years, we have been trying to spread the word in the world about all the evil that was inflicted in this death factory and in other German death factories. In the name of truth we want to oppose any attempts of relativization of the Shoah in the contemporary world. I wish to thank those people who search for the truth and tell us about the victims and perpetrators of the crime. This has been, in particular, the object of the International Auschwitz Council and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Thanks to the donors from all over the world, in recent years the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation has been making efforts to preserve the premises of the camp in their authentic shape.

You contribute to the saving of this poignant sign of memory which also serves as a warning, the warning that should transpire from Auschwitz-Birkenau for the whole world. Since to remember Auschwitz also means to remember about the need to stand up for our values: freedom, justice, tolerance as well as respect of human rights and civil liberties.

Years ago, John Paul II stated here that Auschwitz is an examination of conscience for the whole mankind. He went on to warn: "One nation can never develop at the expense of another, at the expense of its subordination, conquest, oppression, at the expense of exploiting it, at the expense of its death."

Let us recall what are the results of breaking nations' right to self-determination, inviolability of borders, contempt of human life and passive attitude in face of evil. From this very place we denounce all manifestations of hatred, anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

An Auschwitz survivor, Primo Levi, pointed out that "those who forget the past are condemned to repeat it". It is our obligation: of Europe and indeed of the whole world to remember for the sake of the ones who suffered here, for your sake, Ladies and Gentlemen, who have survived a camp gehenna. It is equally our obligation to remember for our own sake and for the sake of our future.