

Mister President, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Inmates,

“You are in the German concentration camp of Auschwitz. As a hostile element of the Third Reich – for Jews two weeks, for priests a month, for young and healthy three months, this is how long you have the right to live here, no longer than that.

All and any insubordination or rebellion will be ruthlessly stamped down. For any resistance to authorities, attempt to escape – death is the penalty. The only way out of here is through the chimney of the crematoria”.

These are the words that were shouted out by the Lagerführer SS-Hauptsturmführer Karl Fritzsch to us, 728 Polish political prisoners of the first transport, on June 14, 1940. They were put into practice with criminal persistence for over four and a half years of existence of the Konzentrationslager Auschwitz.

A testimony to this are hundreds of transports: Poles, Soviet POWs, Jews, Roma and representatives of a dozen other nations. It was proven by: hunger, terror, phenol injections, selections in the bunker of Block 11 and executions at the Wall of Death. This was from the very first days.

In mid-1942, the Auschwitz concentration camp was transformed into the extermination camp – Vernichtungslager. Coming to the railway ramp every day are transports of Jews from all the conquered parts of Europe. SS doctors conduct selections. Women who can work are transported to the blocks of Auschwitz I and men to Birkenau. Pregnant women, the ailing, the old and children go to the gas chambers – the Holocaust takes a deathly toll and the efficiency of crematoria and the pyres is still not sufficient for the oppressor.

Several dozen sub-camps are developed around Auschwitz, to which camp administration provides the labor, cashing large amounts of money for slave work in the Nazi industry and mines.

The madness of the Übermenschen – overpeople is opposed by the stronger individuals. From the very first day, there is an ongoing struggle for biological survival, for delivering as many lives as possible from death, for preserving human dignity.

In the camp and around it, organized resistance movement was also functioning, led by the Home Army, the Polish Socialist Party and Peasants' Battalions. The sacrifice of Poles from the zone adjoining the camp was priceless. Escapes from the camp had become an effective way of self-defense.

The prisoners were escaping in order to take away the documents of SS crimes, to tell the world the truth about the camp and to fight with the occupant with guns in their hands. Few experienced this happiness. Only 10% of the escapes ended in success.

At the sound of the camp siren, special SS pursuit units, supported by armed patrols of German Bauers in place of the expelled Poles, were setting off to search the escapees. Sharp wailing of the siren was filling the prisoners with fear because of repressions, but it was also a sign of hope that the world will learn about Nazi crimes in KL Auschwitz-Birkenau.

I heard the siren myself for the last time late in the evening on February 27, 1943, when – after my escape from Auschwitz – I was crossing the Soła river among ice floe.

This sound still lies in my subconsciousness. I paid a heavy price for my escape from the camp. As a result of repressions, Sicherheitsdienst arrested my sister and my mother, who was deported to KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, and then to Ravensbrück. Fortunately, they survived this ordeal.

The merciful faith made it that today, on the 70th Anniversary of the seizure of the Auschwitz-Birkenau-Monowitz camp complex by the Red Army, together with my friends, former inmates of KL Auschwitz-Birkenau, I can now be standing in front of the monument of the Victims of Fascism in Birkenau to honor the memory of those who did not survived, those who passed away

Let us honor Them with a moment of silence.

Thank you