



**Statement by Congressman Alcee L. Hastings
Chairman
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

Hearing on

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews

March 13, 2008

Last May, I went to Poland to participate in a conference on “Security and Democracy in the Middle East.” I was fortunate enough during that visit to have the opportunity to meet with the Director and Deputy Director of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, and they were kind enough to introduce me to the extraordinary vision they have for this extraordinary Museum.

It is my hope that, with today’s hearing on Capitol Hill, we can introduce an even larger community of people to that vision.

Prior to the Holocaust, Poland may have had the largest Jewish population in the world. The losses of the Holocaust are measured not only by the number of Polish citizens whose lives were lost during the Holocaust, but by the destruction of a thousand years of extraordinary Polish-Jewish cohabitation.

Indeed, when French President Nicolas Sarkozy spoke of the Museum recently, he said it “will be a reminder of how quickly hatred can doom an entire community to extermination.” And as we know, genocide is not just a remote piece of history, but a terrible plague we will continue to face today and tomorrow—unless we put an end to it once and for all.

Today, the Museum of the History Polish Jews represents a singular, historic effort in Europe not only to honor those victims of genocide, but to reclaim a part of Polish history that

the Nazis sought to utterly eradicate. In a country that still struggles with its own legacy of anti-Semitism, this is a critically important undertaking.

I was not able to go back to Poland to attend the groundbreaking ceremonies for the Museum last June. But I did send someone from the Helsinki Commission's staff, and I am reliably informed that – notwithstanding extremely heavy rain – this was a well-attended and properly momentous occasion.

Among the many dignitaries who participated in the groundbreaking ceremony was the Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv, Meir Lau, whose own parents came from Poland and who was born in Poland.

He invited the Iranian President, who has denied the Holocaust, to visit the Museum when it opens. I want to quote exactly what the Rabbi said:

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad is invited to come here to see the millions of Polish Jews and to know also how they perished from this world so he will understand the Holocaust is a real thing, is not a legend. You cannot deny history, you cannot deny facts, and the facts and the history of Polish Jews will be shown, expressed and represented here in this museum.

I hope I will be in Poland when this Museum opens. I would like to be there for that. And friends, I would like to see the Iranian leader come to this Museum.

Finally, I know that our Ranking Minority Member, Chris Smith will talk about the bill he introduced to authorize a \$5 million U.S. contribution for the work of this Museum, and I want to commend Chris for spearheading that effort. I co-sponsored this bill when it was introduced in 2006 and again last year, and I hope, with the help of Co-Chairman Cardin and others we can get it passed by the Senate during this Congress. Thank you very much.