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THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF POLAND**

Thank you. I would like to thank Chairman Hastings for holding this important hearing and inviting me to testify. I also want to extend my gratitude to Congressman Smith for introducing the legislation in support of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. Let me also express how the Polish authority highly values the role of the Helsinki Commission in promoting democracy and human rights. It is a privilege to have an opportunity to represent new, free and democratic Poland, with its — one of the most important educational projects, the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. For over 60 years, or three generations, Poles have been rebuilding their country and waiting for the time when the whole country reclaims its identity. The time arrived in 1989. Following the political and social changes in years 1989, 1990, when the Communist system collapsed, giving way to democratic structure, significant changes took place and impossible became possible. One such former impossible, even unthinkable, is the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

Democratic changes in Poland took place also within the Jewish community. The representatives, knowing that I'm coming to meet with you, asked me to tell you that there are Jews in Poland—a tiny community of possibly 15,000, yet very dynamic and vibrant, and very sensitive to being told it does not exist. While the number of Jews living in Poland today is small, Jewish presence in public consciousness is large. But, of course, this community is not even a partial part of the all the glory the Polish Jewry was. And this is precisely why we have to be. There is, after all, a reason for which Polish Jewry, which was 3.5 million strong at the eve of World War II, is now only 1/10 of 1,000. That reason is the Shoah. We will build this museum to reclaim what is the Polish heritage, extending for ages before the Holocaust. This is the legacy of Polish Jews who were on the soil we share, not just tolerated guests, but partners in a common history. A part of that history was stained by oppression and injustice. The museum will document that as well. We cannot bring the victims back to life; nor can we undo the wrongs they suffered. What we can and will do is bringing back the magnificent history for Poles, whatever the religion, and for Polish Jews, wherever they reside today, to learn and cherish. They have a right to that history. My country has an obligation to ensure the fulfillment of this

right. The new democratic Poland has the courage to confront its history. As President Kaczynski has stressed on many occasions, there is no history of Poland without the history of Polish Jews. The museum is a public-private partnership established on the basis of an agreement signed on January 25, 2005, by the Polish Minister of Culture, the mayor of Warsaw, Lech Kaczynski, today President of the Republic of Poland, and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute in Poland. The first institution of its type in the new Poland, the museum has had the honor and faced the challenge of being a trailblazer in the area of the historical preservation in Central and Eastern Europe. The museum's diverse funding highlights how agendas co-exist among government entities and the private non-profit institution can serve a higher purpose in informing new generation of the war's citizens in the name of education, enlightenment, respect, tolerance and commemoration. The Minister of Culture, as well as the Warsaw municipal authorities committed themselves to contribute the cost of the creation of the building of the museum by the Association of Jewish Historical Institute offered to finance the cost of the future Berman Exhibition and educational and outreach programs. Since the signing of the agreement, a new election took place. And the new Polish Government, the new President of Poland and the new mayor of Warsaw were elected. Everybody, the past and current Presidents of Poland, past and current representatives of the Polish Government and the local government support the project to the best of their capabilities. In the statement by mayor of Warsaw, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, I would like to submit to the Commission, she declared that building the Museum of the History of Polish Jews is a priority project of that Warsaw local authorities. Both public partners, the city of Warsaw and the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, they affirmed their willingness to cover the cost of the construction of museum building, in spite of many competing needs, and a sharp increase in costs. This is a national commitment above partisan division. The Polish authorities support the museum, but do not control its contents. No other nation in the world, but Americans, can understand such an achievement in less than 20 years after sixty years under Communist control of every aspect of Polish daily life. The museum is located in what once was the heart of the Warsaw Jewish quarter; from 1940 throughout 1943, the center of the Warsaw ghetto; and following the Ghetto Uprising an area reduced to sea of rubble. This sea of ruin and devastation—that was Warsaw, to tell you the truth, of my early childhood and indeed my playground in the mid-'50s, when the first housing developments were built. The light feel in the light-reflecting building of the museum will face the monument commemorating the heroes of

the Ghetto Uprising—one of the two uprisings of Warsaw during the Second World War. The significance of this site, its historical weight and power with which it speaks to visitors and the people who live there is one of the foundations of the future museum. No visit to Warsaw, indeed to Poland, would be complete without a visit to the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. The museum is the first and only museum to focus on the history of Polish Jews and will take its place alongside the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, the Jewish Museum in Berlin, Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, Beth Hatefutsoth Museum of the Jewish Diaspora in Tel Aviv, as one of the most important institutions of its kind. What makes the museum in Warsaw unique is the very place where the Polish Jews have lived for almost 1,000 years. But they have been able to preserve the culture and the religion with the heritage which has been part of the heritage of Poland, Europe, and the world. Distinguished members of this meeting, I truly believe that the museum will connect people around the universal value of respect for different cultures, which can co-exist and overcome racism, anti-Semitism and intolerance. People of Poland are counting on your support. Thank you.