



Musée Holocauste Montréal
Montreal Holocaust Museum

Montreal Holocaust Museum Concerned about Polish Legislation

Tuesday, February 13, 2018

The Montreal Holocaust Museum wishes to signify its deep concern regarding recently adopted legislation by the Government of Poland, signed by the President on February 6, 2018. This law criminalises references to the complicity of Poles in Nazi crimes. As the Polish government revisits history for political purposes, as it recreates a national narrative which speaks to the “protection of the reputation of the Republic of Poland, and the Polish Nation,” the Museum launches an appeal to assure that the history and full context of the Holocaust be protected and taught. Scholars, artists, media and Jews of Polish origin: Holocaust survivors must be able to express both history and memory. What does this law mean for researchers like Père Desbois studying the mass graves of Eastern Europe? Will survivors returning to Poland on the March of the Living be able to share their testimony without fear of legal action?

The history of the Holocaust and World War II is complex. The victims of the Holocaust were Jewish, and 3 million Jews who lived in Poland were murdered because they were Jewish. The Montreal Holocaust Museum fully understands and agrees with historians and conscientious educators, that the camps created by Nazi Germany were not “Polish death camps,” and that they were indeed Nazi camps on occupied Polish soil. Poland as a nation was itself a victim of the Nazi German occupation. Nonetheless, it cannot be denied that countless Jews were victim to the actions of Polish citizens and police. The complexity of genocide means that some Polish citizens saved their Jewish neighbours, but that some denounced them to the Nazis, profited from their denunciation, were involved in their persecution, and appropriated their property when they were deported. The Kielce pogrom, which took place after the Holocaust, was perpetrated by Poles. Antisemitism existed, and pogroms were perpetrated before Nazi occupation. The text of the law does not prohibit any specific term or language, rather its vagueness can be used to prosecute those not ascribing to an official narrative which is yet to be clearly defined.

Montreal Holocaust survivors are largely of Polish origin. They tell stories of both Polish bravery and rescue, and of antisemitism and oppression. In the same year as the Canadian Government has launched a national monument to victims of the Holocaust, we appeal to the Government to honour their memory and use its international relations to assure the respect of history in all its complexity.

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