



The Policy of the Polish Exile Government towards Jews from 1939 to 1945.

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No other member state of the anti-Nazi alliance did more to protect persecuted Jews than Poland, its government, its diplomatic corps and its consular services, which reported to the Polish government in exile.

Through the dedicated efforts of the Warsaw-based Polish Institute of International Affairs, a copious volume comprising over a thousand pages and 554 documents on such activities was published (edited by Piotr Długołęcki), which will be the object of this review.

Hundreds of other documents have been reprinted in full or partially cited in footnotes.

These documents, found through extensive research in eleven Polish and foreign archives, are previously unpublished. The material featured in this volume refers to the entire spectrum of activities by the Polish government, ranging from informational and propaganda campaigns to relief efforts.

The documents demonstrate conclusively that, of all the countries involved, the Polish government, its diplomatic corps, and consular services were the most active aiding the Jews. This level of engagement resulted in part from the fact that Poland was home to Europe's largest Jewish community of over three million people (second in size only to that of the Soviet Union). The Polish authorities felt obliged to assist these citizens, which they did outstandingly. Importantly, the position of the Polish government on this matter was not influenced by reports of anti-Polish sentiments among a significant segment of the Jewish population residing in territories occupied

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Confronting the Holocaust

Documents
on the Polish Government-in-Exile's Policy
Concerning Jews 1939–1945

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by the Red Army after September 17, 1939, which were subsequently incorporated into the USSR. In addition, starting in the early weeks of the war, the Polish government in exile received reports of escalating persecution faced by Jews at the hands of the German occupiers. In February 1940, Jan Karski, who would later become famous, released his first report on the plight of Jews in occupied Poland after leaving Poland for France. The document includes poignant observations on hostility towards Jews on the part of a substantial segment of Polish society.

From the outset of the war, numerous countries impeded the admission of Jews from Poland and elsewhere. Even prior to 1939, Western nations showed a reluctance to admit Jewish refugees, a stance they failed to adjust significantly following the outbreak of war when the issue of Jewish refugees from Poland arose. It is worth noting that during the initial year of the war, it was still possible, although not entirely easy, for Jews to leave Reich occupied territories.

Polish institutions actively arranged and delivered care for Polish refugees of Jewish origin. This applied in particular to Poland's outposts in Budapest and Bucharest before they were closed due to Polish-Hungarian and Polish-Romanian diplomatic relations having been severed. The Polish embassy and consulates in Italy remained highly active. Polish missions in certain non-European countries also endeavored to secure safe havens for Jewish refugees. The Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs engaged in challenging negotiations with the UK government, seeking to shelter these refugees in British territories, which occasionally yielded success.

The German invasion of the USSR on June 22, 1941 started a tragic widespread extermination of European Jews. The Polish government assiduously gathered records of such atrocities based on reports from both the occupied territories and Polish missions abroad. Notably, Polish diplomatic and consular services reported on the persecution of Jews even in nations with which official relations with the exile government had ceased (such as Romania and Bulgaria, facilitated through the General Consulate in Istanbul). Additionally, Jewish politicians, including activists from the left-wing Bund party, provided valuable insights into the plight of Jews in occupied Poland.

In response to Nazi crimes, the Polish government launched an extensive information campaign and publicly appealed to put an end to the genocide and punish the perpetrators. The Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief Gen. Władysław Sikorski addressed this matter in his speeches, accompanied by public statements from government ministers. The National Council, which served in exile as an equivalent of the Polish parliament, adopted relevant resolutions, while bulletins disseminated by Polish information centers raised awareness. Beginning in the autumn of 1942, official Polish reports on the large-scale extermination of Jews were published in English. In December 1942, the Government of the Republic of Poland sent a comprehensive memorandum on the extermination of Jews to the foreign ministers of signatory states of the United Nations Declaration, followed by another in January 1943. Jan Karski played a pivotal role in this endeavor, having escaped to the West from occupied Poland to deliver firsthand accounts to the highest authorities in Great Britain and the United States, including President Franklin D. Roosevelt, highlighting the harrowing circumstances endured by Jews in Poland. In a radio address on May 4, 1943, Gen. Sikorski spoke about the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. In late May, the



Polish government dispatched a memorandum detailing the extermination of Jews in occupied Poland.

The Polish Legation in Bern conducted a significant campaign to secure Latin American passports for Polish Jews, while the Polish government made earnest efforts to rescue Jewish refugees in France from deportation to extermination camps.

The Polish government also advocated for retaliatory measures, urging the bombing of access routes leading to extermination camps, and sought an announcement of the impending punishment of German war criminals. Throughout the duration of the war, the Polish government in exile extended aid to Jewish refugees.

Collectively, these actions shed new light on the complex history of Polish-Jewish relations during World War II.

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