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Statement by Polish American Congress President Frank J. Spula On the Death of Polish President Lech Kaczyński and His Delegation

The Polish ethnic community of the United States shares the sense of shock and loss, and mourns with the people of Poland the tragic deaths yesterday of President Lech Kaczyński, First Lady Maria Kaczyński, and so many of Poland's political, military, religious, and societal heroes and leaders, as well as representatives of our own community.

Across our country today, Polish Americans are going to our churches and monuments to pray for the departed and gather strength from our faith and Polish heritage.

From its inception in 1944 and through its leaders before that, the Polish American Congress fought to make the truth about Katyn known and recognized by the government and people of the United States and other nations. We are deeply saddened that the 70th anniversary and universal acknowledgement of this crime have been marred by another national tragedy.

As Americans of Polish descent and citizens of Poland permanently residing in the United States, the members of the Polish American Congress have taken great pride in the strength of Poland's democracy and alliance with the United States under the leadership of President Lech Kaczyński. The Polish American Congress looked forward to welcoming President and Mrs. Kaczyński in the United States and hosting their meeting with our community later this month.

On behalf of the Polish American Congress and the 10 million strong Polish ethnic community in the United States, I extend our deepest condolences to the people of Poland, its government, and the families and colleagues of those killed in this tragic plane crash. We pledge our continued strong commitment to caring about the well-being of the Polish nation and working for an ever stronger relationship between the United States and Poland. Our thoughts and prayers are with you. □

Prezydent Lech Kaczyński 1949—2010 ☩



President Lech Kaczyński's Katyn address

(Due to have been delivered on April 10th, 2010 at the Katyn Memorial)

"Dear Representatives of the Katyn Families. Ladies and Gentlemen! In April 1940 over twenty-one thousand Polish prisoners from the NKVD camps and prisons were killed. The genocide was committed at Stalin's will and at the Soviet Union's highest authority's command.

The alliance between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union, the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact and the Soviet attack on Poland on 17 September 1939 reached a terrifying climax in the Katyn massacre. Not only in the Katyn forest, but also in Tver, Kharkiv and other known, and unknown execution sites, citizens of the Second Republic of Poland, people who formed the foundation of our statehood who served the motherland were killed.

At the same time families of the murdered and thousands of citizens of the eastern territory of the pre-war Poland were sent into exile deep into the Soviet Union, where their indescribable suffering marked the path of the Polish Golgotha of the East.

The most tragic station on that path was Katyn. Polish officers, priests, officials, police officers, border and prison guards were killed without a trial or sentence. They fell victims to an unspeakable war. Their murder was a violation of the rights and conventions of the civilized world. Their dignity as soldiers, Poles and people, was insulted. Pits of death were supposed to hide the bodies of the murdered and the truth about the crime forever.

The world was supposed to never find out. The families of the victims were deprived of the right to mourn publicly, to proudly commemorate their relatives. Ground covered the traces of crime and the lie was supposed to erase it from people's memory.

An attempt to hide the truth about Katyn – a result of a decision taken by those who masterminded the crime – became one of the foundations of the communists' policy in post-war Poland: a founding lie of the People's Republic of Poland.

It was the time when people had to pay a high price for knowing and remembering the truth about Katyn. However, the relatives of the murdered and other courageous people kept the memory, defended it and passed it on to next generations of Poles. They managed to preserve the memory of Katyn in the times of communism and spread it in the times of free and independent Poland. Therefore, we owe respect and gratitude to all of them, especially to the Katyn Families. On behalf of the Polish state, I offer sincere thanks to you, that by defending the memory of your relatives you managed to save a highly important dimension of our Polish consciousness and identity.

Katyn became a painful wound of Polish history, which poisoned relations between Poles and Russians for decades. Let's make the Katyn wound finally heal. We are already on the way to do it. We, Poles, appreciate what Russians have done in the past years. We should follow the path which brings our nations closer, we should not stop or go back.

All circumstances of the Katyn crime need to be investigated and revealed. It is important that innocence of the victims is officially confirmed and that all files concerning the crime are open so that the Katyn lie could disappear forever. We demand it, first of all, for the sake of the memory of the victims and respect for their families' suffering. We also demand it in the name of common values, which are necessary to form a foundation of trust and partnership between the neighbouring nations in the whole Europe.

Let's pay homage to the murdered and pray upon their bodies. Glory to the Heroes! Hail their memory!" ☩

Poland and world honor Presidential Couple

By Robert Strybel,
Our Warsaw Correspondent

WARSAW—The eyes of the world were on Poland's old royal capital of Kraków recently, where the remains of tragically departed President Lech Kaczyński and First Lady Maria were enshrined in the crypts of Kraków's Wawel Cathedral. That is the final resting place of royalty and other outstanding Poles including Polish and American hero Tadeusz Kościuszko.

The elaborate state funeral featured a 21-gun salute and the tolling of Wawel's huge Zygmunt Bell, rung only on major occasions. The Kaczyńskis had been among 96 senior political, military and religious leaders who had died in a plane crash eight days earlier in Smolensk, Russia. They had been en route to Katyn where 70th-anniversary observances of the 1940 massacre were to be held.

The magnitude of Poland's biggest post-war tragedy as well as the unique venue and circumstances and of the disaster – on Russian soil in connection with the Soviets' cold-blooded murder of 22,000 Polish officers – triggered an unprecedented world-wide reaction. Condolences poured in from around the globe and gestures of national mourning were made not only by Poland's immediate neighbors but even by countries as remote as Brazil. Requests for Andrzej Wajda's film "Katyn" came from many different countries and the hard-hitting movie was shown in the halls of the US Congress.

Nearly 100 world leaders including US President Barack Obama, Britain's Prince Charles, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Nicolas Sarkozy all said they would attend the Kaczyńskis state funeral in Kraków, when a freak accident no-one could possibly have expected disrupted their travel plans. The eruption of a volcano in Iceland a few days earlier, sent a thick cloud of volcanic ash over Europe, closing airports across the continent. The ash contains pulverized glass and stone which can damage jet engines in flight.

What could have been the biggest world memorial summit since the funeral of Pope John Paul II suddenly shriveled down to Central-East European proportions. America's Obama sent his regrets but paid tribute to the deceased Polish statesman by saying: "President Kaczyński was a patriot and close friend and ally of the United States, as were those who died alongside him, and the American people will never forget the lives they led." As a result, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, who ignored the volcanic-ash scare, was the most prominent world leader attending the Kaczyński funeral.

Some 600 Polish and foreign VIPs packed St Mary's Basilica for the requiem send-off of President Lech Kaczyński and his wife Maria, as 150,000 mourners gathered in the Rynek Główny (main square) and adjoining side streets. The proceedings could be viewed on big TV screens strategically located at three prime sites for maximum exposure. When the coffins bearing the remains of the President First Lady set out upon gun carriages across town to their final resting

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