

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

May 31, 2012

His Excellency
Bronislaw Komorowski
President of the Republic of Poland
Warsaw

Dear Mr. President:

Thank you for your letter of May 30. I was proud to honor Jan Karski with the Medal of Freedom, our nation's highest civilian honor. My decision to do so was a reflection of the high esteem in which the American people hold not only a great Polish patriot, but the extraordinary sacrifices of the Polish people during the Nazi occupation of the Second World War.

In referring to "a Polish death camp" rather than "a Nazi death camp in German-occupied Poland," I inadvertently used a phrase that has caused many Poles anguish over the years and that Poland has rightly campaigned to eliminate from public discourse around the world. I regret the error and agree that this moment is an opportunity to ensure that this and future generations know the truth.

As we all know, the Polish people suffered terribly under the brutal Nazi occupation during World War II. In pursuit of their goals of destroying the Polish nation and Polish culture and exterminating European Jewry, the Nazis killed some six million Polish citizens, including three million Polish Jews during the Holocaust. The bravery of Poles in the underground resistance is one of history's great stories of heroism and courage.

Moreover, there simply were no "Polish death camps." The killing centers at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Belzec, Treblinka, and elsewhere in occupied Poland were built and operated by the Nazi regime. In contrast, many Poles risked their lives – and gave their lives – to save Jews from the Holocaust.

That is why I paid tribute to Polish victims of the Holocaust during my visit to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in April. It is why I was honored to pay my respects at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier and the Monument to the Heroes of the Ghetto during my visit to Warsaw last year. And it is why, during the 65th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in 2010, I commended the government and people of Poland for preserving a place of such pain in order to promote remembrance and learning for the world.

I know well the bonds of friendship between our two countries. I was proud to welcome you to the NATO Summit in my hometown of Chicago, which is home to the largest Polish community in the world outside of Warsaw. As President, I have worked with you to strengthen the enduring ties between our nations so that our alliance is stronger than it has ever been.

Poland is one of America's strongest and closest allies. We stand united in facing the challenges of the 21st century in Europe and around the world, and I am confident that, working together, we can ensure that the unbreakable bonds of friendship and solidarity between us will only grow stronger in the days and years ahead.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Barack Obama", written in a cursive style. The signature is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".