

REPUBLIC OF POLAND

PERMANENT MISSION TO THE OFFICE
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**Statement by Ambassador Zdzisław Rapacki
Head of the delegation of Poland
to the Conference on Disarmament**

**60th Anniversary of the Liberation
of the death camp Auschwitz-Birkenau**

Geneva, 27 January 2005

Mr. President,

Since I am taking the floor at the first plenary meeting under your Presidency, let me congratulate you on the assumption of this high office and let me wish you all the success in fulfilling your responsibilities as the President of the Conference on Disarmament. Let me also express my hope that our common efforts will bring tangible results in the work of the CD in this session.

Mr. President, Excellencies, Distinguished Colleagues,

Today we are commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Liberation of the Concentration Camp Auschwitz-Birkenau. More than 40 heads of states, governments and parliaments and those who survived the gehenna on death camp have gathered today in Oswiecim to mark that anniversary. There are also young people among them – those who should transmit the message to the future generations about what has happened in the concentration camp, gas chambers and crematoria in KL Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Though it was but one death camp among many, Auschwitz has become for the world a symbol of terror, genocide, and the Holocaust. It was established by the Nazis in 1940, in the suburbs of the city of Oswiecim which, like other parts of Poland, was occupied by the Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Occupants changed the name of the city of Oswiecim to Auschwitz, which became the name of the camp as well. Auschwitz was a complex consisting of a concentration, extermination, and forced-labour camp and 39 sub-camps.

Over the following years, the camp expanded. At first, only Poles were imprisoned and killed there. They were joined by Soviet prisoners of war, Roma, and almost 30 other nationalities: Czechs, Slovaks, Belgians, Danes, French, Greeks and Dutch and also German political prisoners to name just a few of the nations who suffered in the camp. As of 1942, the camp became the site of one of the greatest mass murders in the history of humanity perpetrated against the European Jews as part of Hitler's plan for the complete destruction of that people – the Holocaust. The majority of the Jewish men, women and children deported to Auschwitz were sent to death in the Birkenau gas chambers immediately after arrival. At the end of the war, in an effort to remove the traces of the crimes they had committed, the Nazis began dismantling and razing the gas chambers, crematoria, and other buildings and forced prisoners capable of marching deep into German interior in so called “death marches” as thousands died. Those left behind in the camp were liberated by Red Army soldiers on January 27, 1945.

It is estimated that among the 1,6 million people brought to Auschwitz there were at least 1,100,000 Jews from all the countries of occupied Europe, over 140,000 Poles (mostly intellectuals and political prisoners, but also people caught in random men-hunts in the streets of Polish towns), approximately 20,000 Roma from several European countries, over 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war, and thousands of prisoners of other nationalities. Approximately 1,5 million people died in Auschwitz.

Mr. President, Distinguished Colleagues,

Today in Oswiecim we hear the voice of the political leaders – as well as of those who survived Auschwitz and other camps in Europe occupied by the Nazis – “let us never forget, let the future generations never forget about the genocide that occurred 60 years ago”. During the UNGA Special Session organised to commemorate 60th Anniversary of the Nazi death camps, which was held on Monday in New York, the UN Secretary General said, “such an evil must never be allowed to happen again”. We should all remember that message.

Mr. President, Excellencies,

Commencing this year’s session of the Conference on Disarmament, it’s worth remembering what happened 60 years ago. This year we will also be commemorating 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. The war which had started at dawn on the September 1, 1939, when Nazi troops invaded my country. Today we are living in a different world. Nations – which were fighting each other 60 years ago – are co-operating now and together confronting new challenges. Let me say that – whatever new threats to the humanity – we must learn the lesson of Auschwitz and be brave enough to act.

Let us keep in mind the words by Robert Cecil, which we can see on the wall each time we enter the Council Chamber: “Here is a great work for peace in which all can participate”, “The nations must disarm or perish” and also “Be just and fear not”. Let us not fear to undertake the task to make the world more secure place for future generations.

Thank you, Mr. President.