

Polish President uses Holocaust Memorial Day to call for German reparations



Polish President Karol Nawrocki speaking at the Death Wall on the site of the former German Auschwitz concentration camp in during the 81st commemoration of the liberation of that concentration camp by the Red Army. EPA/Jarek Praszkiwicz.

Polish President Karol Nawrocki, speaking in Auschwitz on International Holocaust Remembrance Day, repeated his demand for Germany to pay reparations to Poland for damages sustained by his country during the Second World War.

Nawrocki is allied to the opposition Conservatives (PiS), which when last in government (2015-2023) filed a claim for \$1.3 trillion (€1.08 trillion) worth of compensation from Germany.

That claim has not been pursued by the present centre-left government led by Prime Minister Donald Tusk, but Nawrocki had previously insisted on speaking in support of it when visiting Germany in the autumn last year.

Germany has rejected that, arguing the question of reparations was resolved legally in the 1950s when the then-Communist government of Poland, controlled by the USSR, agreed for the Soviets to receive reparations on the Poles' behalf.

During the Second World War German Nazis killed 6 million Polish citizens, 3 million of whom were Jews, of whom 1 million died in Auschwitz.

"To this day, the German state has not paid reparations to Poland for the evils of the Second World War," Nawrocki said during the Holocaust commemoration.

"This is not how you build a world of peace. For every crime and every war, you simply must pay and apologise. Only then will we be able to feel that we have fulfilled our duty.

"Poland is the custodian of the truth about German crimes and the custodian of the truth about the victims who died here, over 1 million of them," Nawrocki said.

"Auschwitz remains a symbol of utter dehumanisation, complete barbarity; it was a death factory organised by the Germans."

According to Nawrocki, who is a historian and a former head of the National Institute of Remembrance, the body responsible for investigating Second World War and Communist crimes, the victims have been remembered but those responsible not held to account.

After the war “we remembered the victims, but we forgot the perpetrators with only 15 per cent of the perpetrators in German concentration camps actually being brought to justice”, he said.

“It was the German nation that supported the ideology of Nazism and allowed Adolf Hitler to come to power.

“It was the German people and the German state that brought about the crime we know as the Holocaust,” Nawrocki said.

The President made a point of recalling how Auschwitz had originally been a camp set up for Polish political prisoners and how Germany had killed thousands of Poles immediately after occupying the country in 1939.

“It is our duty to remember the tragedy of the Holocaust, but also to remember what happened in 1939 and before 1942 and what happened after 1945, when Poland fell under brutal Soviet-backed communist rule,” concluded Nawrocki.

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Source: Brussels Signal

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