

The Last Letter From Szmul Zygielbojm, the Bund Representative With the Polish National Council in Exile

May 11, 1943

To His Excellency

The President of the Republic of Poland

Wladyslaw Raczkiewicz

Prime Minister

General Wladyslaw Sikorski

Mr. President,

Mr. Prime Minister,

I am taking the liberty of addressing to you, Sirs, these my last words, and through you to the Polish Government and the people of Poland, and to the governments and people of the Allies, and to the conscience of the whole world:

The latest news that has reached us from Poland makes it clear beyond any doubt that the Germans are now murdering the last remnants of the Jews in Poland with unbridled cruelty. Behind the walls of the ghetto the last act of this tragedy is now being played out.

The responsibility for the crime of the murder of the whole Jewish nationality in Poland rests first of all on those who are carrying it out, but indirectly it falls also upon the whole of humanity, on the peoples of the Allied nations and on their governments, who up to this day have not taken any real steps to halt this crime. By looking on passively upon this murder of defenseless millions tortured children, women and men they have become partners to the responsibility.

I am obliged to state that although the Polish Government contributed largely to the arousing of public opinion in the world, it still did not do enough. It did not do anything that was not routine, that might have been appropriate to the dimensions of the tragedy taking place in Poland.

Of close to 3.5 million Polish Jews and about 700,000 Jews who have been deported to Poland from other countries, there were, according to the official

figures of the Bund transmitted by the Representative of the Government,** only 300,000 still alive in April of this year. And the murder continues without end.

I cannot continue to live and to be silent while the remnants of Polish Jewry, whose representative I am, are being murdered. My comrades in the Warsaw ghetto fell with arms in their hands in the last heroic battle. I was not permitted to fall like them, together with them, but I belong with them, to their mass grave.

By my death, I wish to give expression to my most profound protest against the inaction in which the world watches and permits the destruction of the Jewish people.

I know that there is no great value to the life of a man, especially today. But since I did not succeed in achieving it in my lifetime, perhaps I shall be able by my death to contribute to the arousing from lethargy of those who could and must act in order that even now, perhaps at the last moment, the handful of Polish Jews who are still alive can be saved from certain destruction.

My life belongs to the Jewish people of Poland, and therefore I hand it over to them now. I yearn that the remnant that has remained of the millions of Polish Jews may live to see liberation together with the Polish masses, and that it shall be permitted to breathe freely in Poland and in a world of freedom and socialistic justice, in compensation for the inhuman suffering and torture inflicted on them. And I believe that such a Poland will arise and such a world will come about. I am certain that the President and the Prime Minister will send out these words of mine to all those to whom they are addressed, and that the Polish Government will embark immediately on diplomatic action and explanation of the situation, in order to save the living remnant of the Polish Jews from destruction.

I take leave of you with greetings, from everybody, and from everything that was dear to me and that I loved.

S. Zygielbojm

* Zygielbojm committed suicide early on the morning of May 12, 1943.

** Authorized representative with full powers in the Polish Underground on behalf of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London.

Source: Yitzhak Arad, Yisrael Gutman, Abraham Margaliot (Eds.), *Documents on the Holocaust, Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland and the Soviet Union*, Yad Vashem, Jerusalem 1981, Document no. 154, pp. 324-327.