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70 Years After The Katyń Massacre, New Details To Be Unveiled At International Conference & Photo Display At Library Of Congress

Katyń Conference, May 5, at the Library of Congress

WASHINGTON, DC, March 25, 2010: The Kosciuszko Foundation, in cooperation with the U.S. Helsinki Commission, today announced that an international conference on the Katyń Massacre would be held at the Library of Congress on May 5. In 1940, the NKVD, Jozef Stalin's secret police, murdered 22,000 Polish officers held as prisoners of war, shooting them, one by one, in the back of their heads. The Soviet Union covered up this atrocity for 50 years, blaming it on Nazi Germany, but the truth about the massacre began to emerge after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The conference will provide a forum for political leaders, scholars, authors and human rights advocates from Poland, Russia and the United States to discuss new details on the massacre, and the possibility of finding a path toward reconciliation between Poland and Russia. The Katyń conference will also include participation from the Cold War Studies program at Harvard University, the Memorial human rights group based in Moscow, and the Polish Embassy in Washington, D.C. There will also be a display of rare Katyń photographs and documents on loan from The Council to Protect the Memory of Struggle and Martyrdom.

On April 7, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk are scheduled to meet in the Katyń Forest, near Smolensk, where Polish officers were murdered.

"I hope the Tusk-Putin visit at Katyń will pave the way for important actions the Russians must take in order to break with the Stalinist past," Senator Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD), Chairman of the Helsinki Commission said. "First and foremost, they owe the Poles a profound apology. Second, they should reopen military archives that were closed in 1994 and release all remaining Katyń documents to demonstrate that they are willing to reinforce their expression of regret with meaningful action."

The U.S. Helsinki Commission, formally known as the Commission on Security and

The Kosciuszko Foundation: The American Center of Polish Culture

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Cooperation in Europe, is an independent U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other OSCE commitments. Sen. Cardin will give one of the main addresses at the conference. Other speakers include Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, National Security Advisor to President Carter; House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, Librarian of Congress James Billington; U.S. Ambassador to Poland during the Bush Administration, Victor Ashe; and Polish Ambassador in Washington D.C., Robert Kupiecki.

Dr. Brzezinski said, "When visiting the site of the Katyń mass murders in late 1988, a visit facilitated by the Gorbachev government, I said publicly - and my comments were reproduced on the Soviet national television - that 'I am here to honor the Polish officers murdered by Stalin and the NKVD in 1940 - and public recognition of this fact is the point of departure for Polish-Russian reconciliation for millions of Russians were also victims of Stalin's terror.' The fact that my comments were disseminated publicly was a signal to me that the Soviet government would soon be acknowledging who was truly responsible for these mass murders. The same spirit should guide the memorials held seventy years later."

Former Ambassador Ashe said, "The Katyń Forest rings in history. Hidden and denied too long, the truth is emerging and it must come out."

The May 5 event will be held in Coolidge Auditorium at the Jefferson Building of the Library. The display of Katyń photographs drew widespread praise at its debut in Budapest, and it will be on display at the European Parliament in April. Much of the content has never been seen before in the United States; and following the conference the exhibition will tour several American and European cities in conjunction with the crime's 70th anniversary.

The Katyń massacre caused the greatest diplomatic crisis of World War II. The Wehrmacht discovered the bodies of the Polish officers in a scenic glade overlooking the Dnieper River in early 1943. At the time, the Germans were reeling from their staggering defeat at Stalingrad. They exploited the discovery of the mass graves at Katyń to split the Western Alliance at a pivotal moment in the war. Poland and the Soviet Union were then allied with the U.S. and Great Britain against Germany, but because the Poles demanded a neutral investigation of the crime by the International Red Cross, Stalin broke off relations with the Polish Government in Exile and later installed a Communist puppet regime in Warsaw.

The massacre was symbolic of a broad policy Stalin initiated to liquidate the Polish intelligentsia soon after he and Hitler overran the country in 1939. Nearly 22,000 officers captured by the Soviets were murdered the following spring (for the Katyń victims

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between April 3 and May 13, 1940). Stalin deported hundreds of thousands of Poles to Siberia where large numbers died due to forced labor, starvation and neglect. Gradually the litany of horrors Stalin visited on the Poles - and other subject peoples - fused into the one-word symbol of Katyń.

Kosciuszko Foundation President Alex Storozynski said, "These murders were a horror and the revisionist history and Katyń denial by the Soviets poured salt on the wounds of all Poles. In addition to the massacre, every Pole had a family member sent to gulags in Siberia. It's time for the truth to be told. Today, Poland has emerged as Europe's economic and democratic success story. Even during this worldwide financial crisis, Poland's economy continued to grow and Poles are focused on their future. Moscow can hit the reset button with Warsaw, but it must release the Katyń archives and treat Poland like a neighbor, rather than a satellite country."

Two prominent Russian historians - Alexander Guryanov, an expert on the Katyń massacre, and Dr. Natalia Lebedeva of the Russian Academy of Sciences - will also serve as panelists at the conference. Other panelists will include Dr. Mark Kramer of the Cold War Studies Program and Davis Center at Harvard; Allen Paul, author of *Katyń: Stalin's Massacre and the Triumph of Truth*; and Dr. Michael Szporer of the Victims of Communism Memorial Foundation and the University of Maryland University College.

The event will conclude with a reception for members of Congress, the Washington diplomatic community, leaders of the Russian and Polish communities in the U.S., representatives of Washington policy-development organizations and the news media. The International Katyń Conference at the Library of Congress is open to the public, but seating is limited, and will be on a first come, first served basis. The Congressional Reception following the conference at 5:30 p.m. is by invitation only.

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Founded in 1925, the Kosciuszko Foundation promotes closer ties between Poland and the United States through educational, scientific and cultural exchanges. It awards up to \$1 million annually in fellowships and grants to graduate students, scholars, scientists,

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professionals, and artists, and promotes Polish culture in America. The Foundation has awarded scholarships and provided a forum to Poles who have changed history.

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