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“LEST WE FORGET THE VICTIMS”.

REPORT ON THE ACTIVITY OF THE INSTITUTE OF NATIONAL
REMEMBRANCE BRANCH IN CRACOW IN CONNECTION WITH
THE EIGHTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE *AKTION REINHARDT*

In 2022, some eighty years have passed since the start of *Aktion Reinhardt* (Operation Reinhardt). Officials of the Third Reich used this cryptonym for an operation whose aim was the mass murder of Jews in the territory of the General Government (GG) and Białystock District. The *Aktion* was conducted by the Germans in 1942–1943 in the context of The Final Solution (*Endlösung der Judenfrage*).

In the extermination camps established by the German authorities in the GG, about one and a half million people were murdered at the time; in the main, Polish citizens. Victims were also murdered during executions that accompanied the deportation of Jews – this included women, children, the elderly and the infirm. This criminal operation began on the night of 16 March 1942 with the deportation of Jewish people from the Lublin Ghetto to the Bełżec extermination camp.¹ Therefore, on the eve of the eightieth anniversary of this *Aktion*, on 15 March

¹ It was only in June 1942 that it was given the name from one of the main implementers of the Holocaust Reinhard Heydrich, who at the beginning of that month died as a result of injuries sustained as a result of the assassination attempt in Prague.

2022, the Institute of National Remembrance (*Instytut Pamięci Narodowej*, IPN), together with the State Museum at Majdanek (*Państwowe Muzeum na Majdanek*) organised the ceremony commemorating its victims. On this day at the Museum and Memorial in Bełżec (*Muzeum i Miejscu Pamięci w Bełżcu*) the following took part in the ceremony: the President of the Institute of National Remembrance, Karol Nawrocki, and the Director of the State Museum at Majdanek, Tomasz Kranz, as well as guests, among whom there were delegates of the national and local government, army, veteran organisations, government and NGO institutions, the Church and other faiths as well as those from the local community.

During the ceremony, letters from President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki were read out. The organisers and invited guests also spoke, among whom the President of the Institute of National Remembrance reminded: “Today these victims call out lest we forget, forget their life and tragic death. They also call out to us to take responsibility and react against the evil of this world.” Further, testimonies were read out from Holocaust survivors Rudolf Reder, Pola Hirszman, Irena Schnitzer and the account of a primary school teacher, Eustachy Ukraiński, in Bełżec. In conclusion, the head rabbi in Poland, Michael Schudrich, with Fr. Stanisław Szałański of the Roman Catholic parish of Our Lady Queen of Poland in Bełżec together with the rev. prot. Dariusz Wasiluk of the Russian Orthodox parish of St Michael in Tomaszów Lubelski said a prayer for the souls of the victims. Subsequently, those taking part in the ceremony gave their respects to those murdered by placing flowers and lights in the recess of the ohel (tombstone monument).²

The record of these proceedings aims to summarise the work of the Cracow IPN undertaken in 2022 with respect to *Aktion Reinhardt*.³ Taking into account the present divisions of territory, the main area of the research for the above is the present day Małopolska Voivodeship. During the Occupation, this region in the main was in the eastern part – created by the German authorities – of the Cracow

² The concept of this anniversary was formulated by Roman Gieroń (IPN Branch in Cracow). The recording of this can be accessed on-line: <https://krakow.ipn.gov.pl/pl4/80-rocznica-akcji-reinhardt/163252,Uroczystosc-upamietniajaca-ofiary-niemieckiej-Akcji-Reinhardt-Bełzec-woj-lubelsk.html>, (accessed 25 November 2022).

³ The abovementioned report of proceedings does not include the work of IPN Delegation in Kielce.

District of the GG. Here, deportations of Jews to the Bełżec extermination camp began in June 1942 from Cracow. Thus residents of the Cracow Ghetto prior to deportation were crowded onto Zgody Square (at present Bohaterów Getta Square) and then formed into columns and groups by the Germans under the escort of soldiers and led to the railway station in Płaszów. From there, the Jews were deported to Bełżec. It is estimated that during the June *Aktion*, between 5,000 and 7,000 people were sent to their deaths. Shortly after its conclusion on 20 June, the Cracow Ghetto was reduced in area.⁴ For the eightieth anniversary of these events, it was possible to visit two exhibitions at Bohaterów Getta Square until 30 June 2022 that were organised by the IPN: *Zagłada Żydów europejskich* (The Genocide of European Jews)⁵ and *Polacy ratujący Żydów podczas II wojny światowej* (Poles Rescuing Jews During the Second World War).⁶

Over the next few weeks and months, IPN delegates in Cracow took part in commemorative events such as Remembrance Marches, conferences and ceremonies for the victims of the Holocaust that were deported from cities, towns and villages in the Cracow District and territories incorporated into the Third Reich. The Cracow IPN co-organised events and commemorative parades in memory of victims in Tarnów and Zbylitowska Góra (12 and 17 June), Olkusz (8–14 June), Wadowice (2 July), Maków Podhalański (17 August), Myślenice (22 August), Nowy Sącz (23–28 August), Bochnia (24 August), Skawina (2 September), Słomniki (2 September), Miechów (4 September), Wolbrom (5 September), Brzesko (10–11 September), Tuchów (13 September), Dąbrowa Tarnowska (16 September), Żabno (20 September), Pińczów (26 October) and Zakliczyn (26 January 2023).⁷ On the invitation of the organisers (government offices, associations and foundations) Cracow IPN also took part in ceremonies at Bobów (12 August), Stary Sącz (17 August), Limanów (18 August), Gorlice (19 August), Biała Niżna (21 August),

⁴ The next *Aktion* in the Cracow Ghetto took place on 28 October 1942. Several months later, on 13 and 14 March, the Jewish suburb in Cracow was liquidated.

⁵ The exhibition can be downloaded from the following link: <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/edukacja-1/wystawy/85863,Wystawa-Zaglada-Zydow-europejskich-do-pobrania-PLen.html> (accessed 28 March 2022).

⁶ The exhibition can be downloaded from the following link: <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/edukacja-1/wystawy/87180,Wystawa-Polacy-ratujacy-Zydow-w-czasie-II-wojny-swiatowej-do-pobrania.html> (accessed 28 March 2022).

⁷ At first, this ceremony was planned for October or November 2022.

Mszana Dolna (22 August), Wieliczka and Niepołomice (26 August), and in Rabka (28 August). The details of these particular commemorative events taking place were placed on the webpage of the Cracow IPN in the tab “80th anniversary of *Aktion Reinhardt*,” and on Facebook.

During the abovementioned anniversaries, there was also an exhibition, “*Aktion Reinhardt 1942–1943*,”⁸ organised by IPN in Tarnów, Nowy Sącz, Bochnia, Wolbrom, Dąbrowa Tarnowska, and Żabno. Another exhibition, “Poles Rescuing Jews during the Second World War,” was presented in Tarnów and Dąbrowa Tarnowska. The final exhibition, “The Genocide of European Jews” (*Zagłada Żydów europejskich*) could be visited in Tarnów, Olkusz, Nowy Sącz, and Żabno.

One should also note the work of The Office for Commemorating Polish Struggle and Martyrdom (*Biuro Upamiętniania Walk i Męczeństwa*) in Cracow, which in collaboration with the mayor of Pińczów, funded the plaque commemorating Polish Jews murdered by Germans mounted at the entrance to the Old Synagogue (*Stara Synagoga*) in Pińczów (the unveiling ceremony took place on 26 October) and, together with the Zakliczyn town authorities and descendants of the Riegelhaupt-Kempiński family, a monument and plaque commemorating murdered Jews from Zakliczyn and other towns was officially mounted in Zakliczyn (ceremonial unveiling on 26 January 2023).⁹ Moreover, the Cracow Office mentioned above in conjunction with the mayor of Maków Podhalański funded a plaque commemorating Jews murdered by the Germans that was mounted on the station building in Maków Podhalański (18 August), whence the Germans deported Jewish residents to their death.

On account of the surveys conducted in Poland over a decade ago that showed only 0.9% of respondents mentioned the extermination camp of Bełżec as a place of Jewish genocide,¹⁰ the Cracow IPN, because of its place on the Polish map as it were, saw one of its main tasks as education on the role of this extermination camp as a place of human massacre for the majority of Małopolska Jews. In June

⁸ The exhibition was undertaken by the Lublin Branch of the IPN National Education Office and the Lublin Branch of the IPN National Education Delegation in Radom and can be downloaded from the following link: <https://edukacja.ipn.gov.pl/edu/wystawy/wystawy-elementarne/161287,Aktion-quotReinhardtquot-19421943.html> (accessed 9 January 2023).

⁹ This commemorative site was already established in 2022.

¹⁰ *Akcja „Reinhardt”. Historia i upamiętnianie*, ed. by P. Lehnstaedt and R. Traba (Warsaw, 2019), p. 7.

2022, on the anniversary of the systematic deportations from the Cracow District to the Bełżec extermination camp, the educational film *Aktion Reinhardt in the Cracow District*¹¹ was shown for the first time on the Cracow IPN portal, which it produced under the direction of Jarosław Migoń.

The film showed the evolution of German anti-Jewish policy as well as the course that *Aktion Reinhardt* took mainly from the perspective of two key cities of this region; Cracow (from where deportations began to Bełżec) and Tarnów (at that time the greatest concentration of Jewish people in that area). It is estimated that approximately 140,000 people were deported to the extermination camp of Bełżec from the Cracow District. The film aimed, as Martyna Grądzka-Rejak mentioned in the review of the script – to refer to the local perspective, thanks to which the production could be used also by educators in Małopolska examining the issue of the Holocaust. The screening of the film for school students took place at the Museum of Independence Myślenice (*Muzeum Niepodległości w Myślenicach*) on 22 August at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska Comprehensive High School (*Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej*) in Skawina on 5 September, at the Culture Centre (*Dom Kultury*) in Wolbrom on 5 September and at the Culture Centre in Tuchów on 13 September.

The next element of education work on the part of the Cracow IPN was the preparation of war historical supplements that after publication in the local press were placed on the IPN portal. The first, *Zbrodnicza akcja* (Criminal *Aktion*), appearing on 18 March 2022, was a free supplement to *Dziennik Polski* (Polish Daily).¹² The following articles were featured: Filip Musiał's *Niemiecka zbrodnia na polskich Żydach* (German Crimes against Polish Jews), Rafał Opulski's *Wieczny Żyd, Antysemicka propaganda III Rzeszy* (The Eternal Jew. Antisemitic Propaganda of the Third Reich), Anny Czocher's *Zaczęły się systematyczne prześladowania Żydów* (There Began Systematic Persecution of Jews), Martyna Grądzka-Rejak's *'Strzępek*

¹¹ The film can be accessed on the portal of the IPN Branch in Cracow: <https://krakow.ipn.gov.pl/pl4/80-rocznica-akcji-reinhardt/166724,Aktion-Reinhardt-w-dystrykcie-krakowskim-Film-edukacyjny-krakowskiego-IPN.html> (accessed 25 November 2022). The script for the film was written by Roman Gieroń and Michał Masłowski, Head of the IPN National Education Office in Cracow, in collaboration with film director Jarosław Migoń.

¹² The supplement can be accessed online: <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/publikacje/periodyki-ipn/dodatki-historyczne-do/161558,Zbrodnicza-Akcja-Dodatek-prasowy-PDF.html> (accessed 16 January 2023).

nadziei i dno rozpaczy. *Aktion Reinhardt w dystrykcie krakowskim* (A Glimmer of Hope and the Depths of Despair. *Aktion Reinhardt* in the Cracow District), Roman Gieron's *Zatem wyśle pan zakładników natychmiast, by przeszukali cały teren* (You Shall Therefore Send Hostages At Once, So They Comb the Whole Area), and Joanna Lubecka's *Nieukarani sprawcy* (The Perpetrators Not Punished). These articles were related to the life of Jewish communities in the GG between 1939 and 1942, anti-Jewish propaganda, the course that *Aktion Reinhardt* took, the capture of those escaping the Holocaust as well as post-war trials of officials responsible for the crimes committed.

The remaining three supplements – that can be called regional – were tied to the commemoration of victims of deportation in particular cities, towns, and villages in present-day Małopolska Voivodeship. On 10 June 2022 came out the supplement *Zagłada Żydów w Tarnowie* (Genocide of Jews in Tarnów), also containing the article by Martyna Grądzka-Rejak “Byliśmy jak sparaliżowani” (We Were as if Paralysed) and that of Maciej Korcuć “Zdruzgotane iluzje” (Crushed Illusions), as well as the interview by Roman Gieroń with Leszek Hońdo, Head of the Department of Jewish Culture (*Zakład Kultury Żydów*) at the Institute of Jewish Studies (*Instytut Judaistyki*), Jagiellonian University, “Zdawali sobie sprawę, że Żydzi zostaną wkrótce zamordowani” (They Realised that Jews Will Soon Be Murdered).¹³ On 19 August 2022 another supplement was published: *Zagłada Żydów w Nowym Sączu* (The Genocide of Jews in Nowy Sącz), also containing articles by the following: Łukasz Połomski, “Żydzi sądecy w międzywojniu” (Nowy Sącz Jews in Interbellum Poland), Artur Franczak, “Getto w Nowym Sączu” (The Ghetto in Nowy Sącz), Martyna Grądzka-Rejak, “Szukają błędnym wzrokiem tych, których już na wieki utracili” (Hopelessly Looking For Those They Have Lost for Centuries), and the interview by Roman Gieroń with Urszula Antosz-Rekucka, community curator of historical objects, founder and director of The Sztetl Foundation (*Fundacja Sztetl*), Mszana Dolna: “Przedwojenne życie, zagłada i upamiętnienie historii mszańskich Żydów” (Prewar Life, Genocide and

¹³ The supplement can be accessed on-line: <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/publikacje/periodyki-ipn/dodatki-historyczne-do/166331,Zagłada-Zydow-w-Tarnowie-Dodatek-prasowy-do-pobrania-PDF.html> (accessed 16 January 2023).

Commemorating the History of Mszana Jews).¹⁴ On 26 August 2022 the final supplement was published: *Zagłada Żydów na Podhalu* (The Genocide of Podhale Jews) that also contained articles by Marcin Chorążki “Wojenne realia na Podhalu” (Everyday Life in Wartime Podhale), Martyna Grądzka-Rejak “Zagłada nowotarskich Żydów” (The Genocide of Nowy Targ Jews), and Roman Gieroń, “Zastali na drzwiach kartkę, że mają zgłosić się w Nowym Targu” (They Found a Note on Their Door to Report to Nowy Targ).¹⁵ These supplements and their planning were initiated by Roman Gieroń.¹⁶

The above articles, popularising modern history also appeared in a digital version on the IPN portal, tab devoted to the 80th anniversary of *Aktion Reinhardt*: Michał Zajda, “Bełżec. Zapomniane miejsce kaźni polskich Żydów” (Bełżec, a Forgotten Place of Massacres of Polish Jews); Joanna Lubecka, “Adolf Eichmann. Człowiek w kapciach w kratkę” (Adolf Eichmann. A Person in Checkered Slippers), and Roman Gieroń, “Morderca w białych rękawiczkach. Willi Haase” (Willi Haase – ‘Murderer in White Gloves’).

Historians from the Cracow Branch of IPN also conducted workshops and gave lectures and papers devoted to the German operation against Jews; they also worked with the media by giving journalists historical commentaries. On 23 March 2022 at the IPN Centre for Education, Next Stop History (*Centrum Edukacyjne Przystanek Historia IPN*) in Cracow in the context of the cycle Wednesday at the Archives (*Archiwalna środa*) a lecture was given by Michał Zajda from the IPN Archives in Cracow: “Aktion ‘Reinhardt’. Ideologiczne podstawy, przebieg i pamięć o ofiarach niemieckiego ludobójstwa” (*Aktion Reinhardt. The Ideological Foundations, Course of Action and Memory Devoted to Victims of Genocide at the Hands of Germans*). The speaker outlined German operations concerning the preparation for the murder of European Jews, the realisation of *Aktion Reinhardt* and preserving

¹⁴ The supplement can be accessed on-line: <https://krakow.ipn.gov.pl/pl4/edukacja/przystanek-historia/169157,Zaglada-Zydow-w-Nowym-Saczu-Dodatek-prasowy-do-pobrania-PDF.html> (accessed 16 January 2023).

¹⁵ The supplement can be accessed on-line: <https://krakow.ipn.gov.pl/pl4/edukacja/przystanek-historia/169313,Zaglada-Zydow-na-Podhalu-Dodatek-prasowy-do-pobrania-PDF.html> (accessed 16 January 2023).

¹⁶ The author would like to express his deep gratitude to Martyna Grądzka-Rejak for her help in making these publications possible.

the memory of the Holocaust. Also, in this place several days earlier, on 9 March, at the Next Stop History in Marszałkowska Street in Warsaw during the conference “Aktion »Reinhardt i Zagłada« polskich Żydów – w kręgu mechanizmów i sprawców” (“*Aktion* ‘Reinhardt and Genocide’ of Polish Jews – Mechanisms and Perpetrators”) Roman Gieroń delivered a paper devoted to Wilhelm Haase, responsible from October 1942 for the direct supervision of this *Aktion* in the Cracow District.¹⁷ On the basis of the archival research conducted, he went on to outline Haase’s work and the post-war trial before the Voivodeship Court in 1951. Moreover, Roman Gieroń went on to demonstrate the considerable amount of valuable information concerning the crimes committed during *Aktion Reinhardt* that was documented in the above-mentioned court case.

On 25 May 2022, together with the Małopolska Centre for Teacher Education (*Małopolskie Centrum Doskonalenia Nauczycieli*), staff from the respective IPN Cracow Offices of State Education and Historical Research organised a seminar on the 80th anniversary of *Aktion Reinhardt* in Małopolska. In this context, online workshops were directed towards teachers. The following lectures were conducted during the conference: Rafał Opulski, “Nowy człowiek w nowym społeczeństwie. Geneza i istota totalitaryzmów” (The New Person in the New Society); Roman Gieroń, “*Aktion Reinhardt* w dystrykcie krakowskim” (*Aktion Reinhardt* in the Cracow District) and Michał Masłowski “Zagłada Żydów w powiecie olkuskim” (The Genocide of Jews in Olkusz County). In conclusion, educational materials in relation to the Holocaust were presented.

In the months that followed, papers were given concerning *Aktion Reinhardt* by Roman Gieroń at the Museum of Independence Myślenice (*Muzeum Niepodległości w Myślenicach*) on 22 August), Maria Curie-Skłodowska Comprehensive High School (*Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej*) in Skawina on 5 September, City and County Public Library (*Miejska i Powiatowa Biblioteka Publiczna*) in Brzesko on 10 September,¹⁸ City Museum (*Muzeum Miejskie*) on

¹⁷ Julian Scherner was responsible for the coordination of this *Aktion* in the Cracow District, while Martin Fellenz was responsible directly for supervision in the area and after his departure, Wilhelm Haase.

¹⁸ The paper was given during the conference devoted to the 80th anniversary of Jews from Brzesko, which was organised by the Municipal Cultural Centre at Brzesko, the Association “Memory and Dialogue. Common History”, and the Brzesko Townhall.

13 September and the Culture Centre (*Dom Kultury*) in Tuchów on 13 September as well as at the Zakliczyn Townhall on 26 January 2023.

In the same year of the IPN publication devoted to “*Aktion Reinhardt* – 80. rocznica niemieckiej zbrodni 1942–1943” (*Aktion Reinhardt* – 80th Anniversary of German Crimes, 1942–1943) and under this mast heading, Ryszard Kotarba from the IPN Cracow archives published *Żydzi Krakowa w dobie zagłady (ZAL/KL Płaszów)* (*Cracow Jews at the Time of Genocide – ZAL/KL Płaszów*). This study is very comprehensive, numbering over 800 pages and made up of fifteen chapters where the author undertook to demonstrate a part of the history of Cracow Jews during the German Occupation – in particular with respect to the period concerning the functioning of the labour camp and thereafter, the concentration camp in Płaszów.

To conclude, the Cracow Branch of IPN, in respect to the preservation of the memory of countless victims at the hands of German crimes perpetrated, organised some three score varied activities and initiatives as well as supporting relevant organisations for the purpose of commemorating these victims and disseminating knowledge on the German *Aktion Reinhardt*, where up to the end of 1942 the majority of Cracow Jews and those from surrounding towns and villages were murdered in the extermination camp of Bełżec.