

Polish Prime Minister slammed for alleged anti-migrant remarks during Auschwitz memorial

Vanessa Gera
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Critics have denounced Poland's prime minister for making comments during a memorial observance at Auschwitz that appeared to defend her tough anti-migrant policies.

Beata Szydlo said that "in today's restless times, Auschwitz is a great lesson showing that everything must be done to protect the safety and life of one's citizens".

The remark was widely understood as a defence of her conservative government's refusal to accept refugees as part of a European Union resettlement plan, a position that prompted the European Commission to launch legal action this week against her government.

The Commission also took action against the Czech Republic and Hungary.

"Such words at such a place should never be spoken by a Polish prime minister," Donald Tusk, the president of the European Council and the former Polish prime minister, said on Twitter.

Mrs Szydlo's ruling party, Law and Justice, initially tweeted her remark but removed the tweet as people expressed shock, accusing her of abusing political memory for political gain.

"Szydlo showed today that she has no problems using both living Arabs and dead Jews in her primitive propaganda," said Tomasz Lis, the editor of the Polish version of Newsweek.

"Auschwitz must remind us of the need to defend universal human rights, not closing borders to refugees," said Rafal Pankowski, the head of Never Again, an organisation that fights neo-Nazism and other forms of extremism.

Mrs Szydlo, who grew up in the town of Oswiecim, where the former death camp is located, made her remarks during a ceremony marking the 77th anniversary of the first transports of Polish prisoners to the camp.

Polish government spokesman Rafal Bochenek says the entirety of her speech - which focused on Polish suffering at Auschwitz and heroism in during the Second World War - makes clear no ill will was intended.

The Germans murdered an estimated 1.1 million people at the Auschwitz-Birkenau complex in what was then occupied Poland.

Some of the first victims of the camp were Poles who resisted the murderous German occupation of their country, although by war's end most of the people killed there were Jews transported from across Europe.

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