

Foundation Honoring Holocaust Hero Jan Karski Among Groups Blacklisted by Controversial Polish Education Official

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A foundation named in honor of the World War II Polish resistance hero Jan Karski has been included on a blacklist of more than 200 organizations deemed by a regional educational official to be implementing the “destruction of social norms” in Poland’s schools.



The Jan Karski Educational Foundation was among 203 non-governmental organizations blacklisted by Barbara Nowak, the controversial education superintendent for the Malopolska province in southeastern Poland, which includes the city of Krakow. Nowak’s past outbursts have included an attack on the museum at the Auschwitz concentration camp for supposedly emphasizing the “foreign, not the Polish narrative” in its exhibitions.

The Karski Foundation’s main goals are the protection of human rights and the promotion of tolerance and openness. Karski himself fought in the Polish army in 1939 when he was captured by the German invading forces. While being deported to a POW camp, he escaped, and went on to serve the Polish underground resistance.

In 1942, Karski was smuggled into the Warsaw Ghetto on two different occasions, providing essential eyewitness accounts of the suffering of its Jewish population. The following year, Karski met with President Franklin D. Roosevelt in Washington, DC, famously recounting afterward that the American leader had asked about the condition of horses in Poland, but not the country’s Jews. In a 1981 speech in Washington, DC, Karski — who was a devout Catholic — reflected that his “faith makes me say that humanity has committed a second original sin by allowing the Holocaust.”

Karski continued: “This sin will haunt humanity until the end of the world. It haunts me. I want it to stay that way.”

Along with the Karski Foundation, other organizations on Nowak’s blacklist include the Jewish Center of Oświęcim, the town adjacent to the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp, the Never Again Association, an anti-racist NGO, and the Roma People’s Association of Poland, another Oświęcim-based organization promoting civil rights for the country’s Roma communities.

A committed right-wing nationalist, Nowak first intimated the existence of her blacklist in an interview on Jan. 7 with broadcaster Radio ZET. Because that exchange was dominated by her false claim that vaccinations against COVID-19 are a “medical experiment” — a remark that led Polish Health Minister Adam Niedzielski to call for her dismissal — her comments in the same interview about NGOs infiltrating Polish schools with “harmful content” received less attention.

Last week, Nowak presented a group of parliamentary deputies with a selection of educational materials which she said were “destroying the social norms on which marriage and family are based.” She then accused the blacklisted organizations of “sexualizing children and adolescents under the guise of education.”

As well as NGOs dealing with racism, antisemitism and Holocaust education, Nowak’s list additionally includes groups working on children’s welfare, among them the “More Loved Foundation,” which caters to children with Down Syndrome.

Condemnation of the blacklist was widespread. Tomasz Kuncewicz — director of the Jewish Center in Oświęcim — said that Nowak’s inclusion of his organization was “an attempt to defame, slander and hate, and thus may threaten the security of our institution and its employees.” Kuncewicz stressed that he had notified the US Consulate in Krakow of the measure.

Zygmunt Stepiński, the director of the POLIN Museum of Jewish history in Warsaw, confessed to being “amazed to hear the media reports that Malopolska’s Superintendent of Education placed the Jewish Center in Oświęcim and the Jan Karski Educational Foundation — institutions implementing educational projects important from the perspective of Polish-Jewish history — on the list of ‘highly harmful’ entities.”

A separate statement from the central Europe office of the American Jewish Committee (AJC) praised the blacklisted groups. “Their contribution to building a community based on mutual respect cannot be overestimated,” the AJC said.

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