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Czechs, Lithuanians, united with Poles on Katyn, Smolensk anniversaries

President of the Czech Republic Milosz Zeman sent letters to President Andrzej Duda on the 80th anniversary of the Katyn massacre and on the 10th anniversary of the Smolensk tragedy, Zeman's website reported.

"Even ten years after this tragedy, the heartbreak of the Polish nation is still very great," wrote the Czech president in a letter devoted to the anniversary of the Smolensk disaster. He stated that he personally felt the intensity of this tragedy, "the greatest in the recent history of Poland," while laying flowers at the monument to the victims at Pilsudskiego Square in Warsaw in May, 2018.

Zeman declared that together with President Duda and millions of Poles around the world, he joined in the commemoration of President Lech Kaczynski and the other victims of the disaster.

Zeman also sent a letter referring to the 80th anniversary of the Katyn massacre.

"I assure you that, even after 80 years, this crime has not been forgotten," wrote the Czech leader. This massacre still causes outrage, as do all crimes committed by totalitarian regimes, he said.

"It is our shared responsibility to safeguard freedom and democracy so that such crimes never occur again," he said. He added that in connection with the anniversary, he and the Czech people were united with Poles.

Also, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevicius in a letter to his Polish counterpart Jacek Czaputowicz, wrote: "We commemorate, together with all of Poland, the 80th anniversary of the bloody Katyn massacre and the 10th anniversary of the Smolensk tragedy, and express our sincere support and solidarity."

Linkevicius said that the massacre of over 22,000 Polish officers and representatives of the intelligentsia committed by the NKVD Soviet secret police in Katyn, western Russia, and other locations in the spring of 1940, was a tragic loss for Poland, and that its long-standing denial and the concealment of its perpetrators had dealt a powerful blow to the families of the victims.

"Such barbaric crimes cannot be repeated. The truth cannot be left unsaid. No matter how cruel it may be, it cannot be hidden," wrote the head of Lithuanian diplomacy in his letter.

He added that Lithuania also commemorated "the Polish heroes, who tragically died on April 10, 2010, in the Smolensk catastrophe - the late President Lech Kaczynski, First Lady Maria Kaczynska and all those who lost their lives that day."

"They were also our friends, whom we could always rely on in difficult moments. That is why their loss is also our irreparable loss, which we experience with deep sadness," noted Linkevicius.

The Katyn Forest Massacre in western Russia was a series of mass executions of Polish POWs, mainly military officers and policemen, carried out by the Soviet NKVD security agency in April and May 1940. The killings took place at several locations, but the massacre is named after the Katyn Forest in western Russia, where some of the mass graves of the victims were first discovered.

About 8,000 of the victims were officers imprisoned during the 1939 Soviet invasion of Poland, another 6,000 were police officers, the rest were Polish intellectuals, deemed by the Soviets to be intelligence agents and saboteurs.

In 1943, the government of Nazi Germany announced the discovery of mass graves in Katyn Forest. The Soviets claimed that the killings had been carried out by the Nazis in 1941 and denied responsibility for the massacres. In 1990, Russia officially acknowledged and condemned the perpetration of the massacre by the NKVD.

April 10 will mark the 10th anniversary of the Smolensk air disaster, which killed Poland's president and a large number of top state and military officials during a failed landing attempt at an airfield in Smolensk, western Russia. The delegation was en route to nearby Katyn for commemorations of the 1940 Katyn Forest Massacre, in which Soviet security forces mass-executed 22,000 Polish POWs, mainly army officers, policemen and administration staff.

Source: PAP

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