

Press Release

March of Life in Gdansk Marks Commemoration and Friendship

On the occasion of the 80th anniversary of the beginning of World War II, the March of Life will take place in Gdansk with the message "Remembering – Reconciliation – Together into the Future". Beside numerous participants from the city of Gdansk and all over Poland the organizers expect a large delegation from Germany as well as representatives from Israel and other nations. About 40 members of the German delegation have ancestors who were involved in the invasion or occupation of Poland as soldiers in the Wehrmacht, or as members of the police and SS. They participate in the March of Life in order to find words that their ancestors never spoke, asking for forgiveness on the 80th anniversary of the German invasion.

The opening event will take place on September 1 at 3 p.m. at Wojciecha Bogusławskiego 1, where the Great Synagogue of Gdansk was located until May 1939, focusing on the commemoration of the Holocaust among the Jewish people. From there, the participants will walk through the streets of Gdansk to commemorate the fallen defenders of Gdansk and the Polish victims of the German invasion. The closing ceremony of the March of Life will take place at the Green Gate. At the heart of this event will be the personal account of an eyewitness about the outbreak of World War II on September 1, as well as the stories of the descendants of victims and perpetrators. To conclude the event, the focus will be on a common peaceful future with statements of friendship between Poland, Germany, Israel and the nations.

In the run-up to the March of Life, Polish and German delegations of the March of Life will visit the mass shooting sites in Piaśnica and Lasy Szpęgawskie to commemorate the thousands of Polish and Kashubian victims who were murdered by German soldiers in systematic actions during the first months of the war.

The organizer of the March of Life in Gdansk is the Polish foundation "Fundacja Pojednanie" in cooperation with the German association "Marsch des Lebens" (March of Life).

In preparation for the March of Life, about 400 Christians from Poland and Germany will take part in a Polish-German Friendship Conference at the Shakespeare Theater in Gdansk from August 30 to September 1.

Edward Ćwierz (President Fundacja Pojednanie): Since the declaration of the Polish bishops in 1965 there has been a wonderful process of reconciliation between the Polish and German people. The painful history between our nations must not be misused today in the struggle between different political camps. With the March of Life in Gdansk we want to express that even 80 years after the German invasion we as Poles and Germans must not stop facing the historical truth, learning from it and shaping the future in friendship with each other and especially with the Jewish people.

Jobst Bittner (Founder March of Life): No one in Germany should be surprised that the tremendous German crimes have left painful traces in the lives of many people in Poland to this day. Many participants of the March of Life from Germany know that their ancestors were actively involved. As descendants of the perpetrators, they want to find words that their fathers and grandfathers never found and ask for forgiveness. They come to the March of Life at Gdansk to stand in solemn commemoration and to help open a new chapter of friendship with Poland.

About March of Life:

Since 2007, March of Life, together with descendants of German Wehrmacht soldiers, as well as members of the police force and SS, has organized commemoration and reconciliation marches at sites of the Holocaust in Europe and worldwide. Since the beginning of the movement in 2007, marches have taken place in 20 nations and over 400 cities with the message "Remembering - Reconciliation - Making a Statement for Israel and against Antisemitism". In 2012, a March of Life took place in Poland for the first time, which also attracted attention in the media.

Link to the report on TVP: <https://bit.ly/2LOWXGt>

For further information: www.marchoflife.org

About Fundacja Pojednanie:

Fundacja Pojednanie has been committed to reconciliation between nations since 2007. It organizes meetings with many groups of Israeli youth who come to Poland as part of the Holocaust History Education Program, and talks with them about difficult parts of their shared history. Since the first March of Life in 2012, its activity has been extended to include the issue of Polish-German reconciliation. The Foundation's aim is to act not on a political but on a private level and to re-establish relations by facing and working through history.

Links:

For a detailed video statement by Jobst Bittner on the Polish-German Reconciliation Conference and the March of Life see <https://bit.ly/345A24h>

Interview with Edward Ćwierz on the background of the event:

Gazeta Wyborcza: <https://bit.ly/2KZQ3l0>

Press Contact:

Poland: Anna Jammroz-Szadaj

Phone: +48-501-565-058

E-Mail: Ania.jamrozsadaj@gmail.com

International: Alexander Dappen

Phone: +49-170-5662056

E-Mail: alexander.dappen@marschdeslebens.org