

Polish law seeks to curb speech linking country to the Holocaust

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff

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WARSAW, Poland — In Poland, it is now against the law to falsely accuse the Polish nation of crimes committed by Nazi Germany. The new law took effect March 1. It is part of a wider effort by Polish **nationalist** authorities to defend the country's honor and pride.

For years Polish officials have struggled to fight phrases like "Polish death camps." Such phrases are sometimes used abroad to refer to Auschwitz and other death camps that Nazi Germany built and operated on occupied Polish territory during World War II.

Some Poles fear that as the war grows more distant, new generations will mistakenly believe that Poles were the **perpetrators** of the Holocaust.

New Law Sparks Debate About Poles' Wartime Activities

The law, however, has sparked a **crisis** with Israel. The nation of Israel was where many Holocaust survivors went after being liberated. Now, survivors and officials there fear the law's true aim is to halt research and debate about Poles who killed Jews during World War II.

Polish and Israeli representatives met March 1 in Jerusalem to resolve a standoff over the law. The Israeli group was led by Yuval Rotem, director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

"We must make sure that historical truths are preserved and that there be no restriction on the freedom of research and speech," Rotem told reporters.

Rotem also expressed concerns about a spike in anti-Jewish hate speech in Poland. Such anti-Semitism has erupted amid the ongoing dispute with Israel.

Polish Official Vows To "Defend and Promote Truth"

Polish team leader Bartosz Cichocki, a deputy foreign minister, said his side was committed to fighting anti-Semitism in Poland. Regarding the new law, he vowed that he and his team would "defend and promote truth, freedom of research, artistic performance and public debate."

"We are here open and ready to answer all the questions and clarify whatever is left to be clarified with regard to the anti-defamation law," Cichocki said.

Poland's president signed the law last month but also sent it to the constitutional court for review. Polish officials have said no criminal charges will be brought until the court has made its ruling, expected in several weeks.

But prosecutors are already looking for cases where Poland has been **defamed** over its wartime activities.

Critics of the law argue it is so broad and vaguely worded that it could be abused.

Jewish Journalist Blames Poland For Some Nazi Crimes

A prominent Jewish journalist, Konstanty Gebert, challenged prosecutors with an article last Thursday in a Polish newspaper, the *Gazeta Wyborcza* daily. The article itself, he said, could be considered a crime under the new law.

Gebert wrote that "many members of the Polish nation bear co-responsibility for some Nazi crimes committed by" the Germans. As an example, Gebert pointed to the wartime massacres of Jews by their Polish neighbors in villages like Jedwabne.

U.S. Also Concerned About Holocaust Speech Law

The law has also been criticized by the United States, which fears it could stifle free expression and academic research. Officials have warned Poland it could hurt Poland's **strategic** relationships with both the U.S. and Israel.

Recognizing the concern about the law, the Polish government dispatched Undersecretary of State Marek Magierowski to Washington this week. He plans to meet with officials, lawmakers and Jewish groups to try to allay their fears.

Magierowski said last week that Poland would never "whitewash" its history or the fact that some Poles did commit terrible acts during World War II. But, he said the law gives the government a means to fight back when the country is charged with taking an active part in the Holocaust.

What is the main idea of this article?

What does the author want you to learn from this article?

Using evidence from the text, explain why you think the United States has criticized this new law: