

Dr. Jan Karski to Receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom

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For more information, contact Wanda Urbanska, 919.706.5972

Cell: 919.710.5645

Consul General Ewa Junczyk-Ziomecka 917.224.4061

Washington, DC – President Barack Obama announced today at the US Memorial Holocaust Museum that the late Dr. Jan Karski will award the Presidential Medal of Freedom later this year. “This highest of civilian honors in our great land validates the principles that Jan Karski stood for: tolerance and understanding among people of all faiths and the courage to speak the truth in the worst of times,” said Jan Karski US Centennial Campaign Director **Wanda Urbanska**.

“We are happy that President Obama has chosen to award this Medal to a remarkable hero of the Polish-American and Jewish- American communities,” said Campaign Steering Committee member **Andrzej Rojek**. Dr. Karski will join the distinguished company of Lech Wałęsa, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela, who have also been awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

In the midst of World War II, Jan Karski was dispatched by the Polish Underground to inform the West about the atrocities being committed by the Nazis in occupied Poland – including the ongoing slaughter of the entire Jewish population – and to seek their intervention. Karski spoke with British and American officials, including President Roosevelt, giving his eyewitness accounts. He later became a professor at Georgetown University, educating generations of students about the dangers of staying silent in the face of tyranny and danger.

The Jan Karski US Centennial Campaign was established in April, 2011, as part of a worldwide effort initiated by the Polish History Museum in Warsaw. **Ewa Wierzynska**, senior advisor for international cooperation at the museum, has been working with groups in several countries to educate them about Karski’s legacy. “Jan Karski – who has been called ‘one man who tried to stop the Holocaust’ – was born in Poland, became a naturalized American and later, an honorary citizen of Israel.” said Mrs. Wierzynska. “His story has great character-forming power. He is truly Humanity’s Hero.”

Polish Consul General in New York **Ewa Junczyk- Ziomecka** – who when she learned of the news was at the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Cincinnati, Ohio where Karski received an honorary doctorate in 1999 – remarked: “The message and the power of Karski’s legacy should be listened to in a world filled with conflict. Karski’s war-time courage and his unmatched empathy is a permanent legacy for humanity.”

Polish Ambassador to the United States **Robert Kupiecki** said, “We are grateful to President Obama for honoring a Pole who demonstrated great courage and risked so much to expose one of humankind’s greatest crimes. He is a beacon of light in an era of darkness.”

For more information about Dr. Karski or about the Campaign, consult the website at <http://jankarski.net/1/618/About+Karski.html> .