



Legislation Text

File #: Res 0713-2025, **Version:** *

Preconsidered Res. No. 713

Resolution recognizing January 27, 2025, as the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp and commemorating January 27 annually as Auschwitz Remembrance Day in the City of New York to honor the memories of the over one million Jews and tens of thousands of others who died brutally there at the hands of Nazis during World War II.

By Council Members Dinowitz, Powers, Menin, Schulman, Restler, Vernikov, Abreu, Brewer, Brooks-Powers, Rivera, Gennaro, Bottcher, Ung, Hanif, Banks, Louis, Hanks and Paladino

Whereas, Auschwitz, the largest of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps, or death camps, opened in 1940 on a former military base outside the town of Oswiecim in southern Poland and eventually became a network of local camps; and

Whereas, Initially, Auschwitz was to be operated as a concentration camp of the kind that the Nazis had used since the early 1930s and was established to detain the many Poles who were being arrested locally; and

Whereas, However, given its proximity to rail lines and its location near the center of Nazi-occupied territory, it became clear that Auschwitz was situated in an ideal spot to serve as an extermination camp to help carry out Adolf Hitler's plan for the extermination of all Jews as well as others deemed "undesirable" by the Nazis, known as the "Final Solution"; and

Whereas, To make way for Auschwitz, factories were taken over by the Nazis, and local townspeople were evicted from their homes, which were then destroyed; and

Whereas, Arriving detainees who were not immediately killed were used as slave labor in the nearby factories to produce munitions, synthetic rubber, and other goods needed in the Nazi war efforts; and

Whereas, When it was fully operational, Auschwitz was actually a group of camps; and

Whereas, Auschwitz I, the original or main camp, housed about 15,000 to 20,000 political prisoners;

and

Whereas, Auschwitz II, the Birkenau camp, was built in 1941 in the village of Brzezinka, which was three kilometers from Oswiecim, under the direction of Heinrich Himmler of the Schutzstaffel, known as the SS; and

Whereas, Birkenau housed about 90,000 prisoners and was the site of the bathhouses where detainees were gassed to death and the crematoria where bodies were burned; and

Whereas, Most of those who were killed at Auschwitz died at Birkenau, including in the four large gas chambers, capable of killing up to 6,000 individuals daily; and

Whereas, Auschwitz III, or Monowitz, which opened in 1942 and was the largest of more than 40 small subcamps located across the area, housed about 10,000 prisoners, who were used by the Nazis as slave labor; and

Whereas, All of the camps and subcamps, surrounded by barbed wire, were isolated from any outside contact; and

Whereas, By mid-1942, most arriving detainees at Auschwitz were Jews, who came on Nazi transports from France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary; and

Whereas, Arriving detainees who were not able to work, according to Nazi doctors, and who were typically young children, the elderly, pregnant women, and the sick or weak were sent right away to the “showers,” where they were killed by Zyklon-B poison gas, which had been previously typically used for pest control; and

Whereas, The names of the detainees who were killed immediately were never placed in the official records of the camp and numbered perhaps approximately 900,000 individuals, thus making the determination of the actual death toll at Auschwitz impossible; and

Whereas, Those prisoners who survived their entry into Auschwitz faced an unspeakably inhumane life of exhaustion from slave labor, disease, malnutrition, miserable living conditions, grossly insufficient sanitary

facilities, lack of water and heat, and brutal acts of torture and unprovoked killing; and

Whereas, The average life expectancy at Auschwitz was no more than a few weeks; and

Whereas, Some prisoners at Auschwitz, including women and children, were the subjects of unimaginable and barbaric medical experiments supervised by German doctor Josef Mengele, known as the “angel of death”; and

Whereas, In October 1944, in a brave act of rebellion, a group of young Jewish men, the *Sonderkommando*, who were responsible for removing dead bodies from the crematoria and gas chambers, successfully attacked the Nazi guards and destroyed one of the gas chambers before being executed themselves; and

Whereas, In January 1945, when the Nazis saw the approach of the Red Army (the Soviet army) and knew that they faced certain defeat, Nazi officials ordered the evacuation of Auschwitz and sent approximately 60,000 prisoners on grueling “death marches” to towns miles away, leading to the deaths of most of the evacuees by exhaustion or execution along the way; and

Whereas, The Nazis also called for the destruction of camp buildings and the destruction of incriminating records that could have been used to document what had happened at the camps; and

Whereas, The Soviet soldiers who arrived on January 27, 1945, found approximately 7,600 starving and ill prisoners, who had been left behind, as well as piles of corpses and tons of the clothing, shoes, and shaved-off hair of former prisoners; and

Whereas, According to the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City (NYC) and calculations made by Franciszek Piper, a historian at the Auschwitz memorial, the final death toll at Auschwitz is estimated to be 1.1 million of the 1.3 million who were sent there, noting that about “1 million of those murdered were Jews, along with nearly 75,000 Poles, 21,000 Sinti and Roma, 14,000 Soviet prisoners of war, and nearly 15,000 others whom the Nazis deemed ‘inferior’ or ‘undesirable’ (including those who were allegedly homosexual, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and people Nazis called criminals)”; and

Whereas, In 1947, Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss was sentenced to death by the Supreme Court in Warsaw and hanged in Auschwitz for his crimes in overseeing the operation of the camp; and

Whereas, In 2015, on the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, about 300 survivors and leaders of over 40 nations met at the Death Gate at the Birkenau camp to commemorate the historic event and to listen to the words of several of the survivors; and

Whereas, Halina Birenbaum, a Warsaw-born Israeli poet, who was sent to Auschwitz at the age of 14, remembered that “[c]ountless times, I was dying, freezing with fear, pain, stress of selection, watching the torment and agony of my fellow female prisoners, my neighbors from overcrowded bunks, who shared the same fate in this indescribable, endless horror, where every minute was a century” and noted that now the “evil of Auschwitz, unacknowledged, unfathomable, flickers peacefully and is reborn in the growing terror, antisemitism, [and] racism”; and

Whereas, Kazimierz Albin, who arrived at the camp in the first group of Polish political prisoners, recalled the stories of those who escaped with the “documents of the SS crimes, to tell the world the truth about the camp” and remembered his own escape almost three years after his imprisonment, after which his mother and sister were arrested and detained, but survived; and

Whereas, Roman Kent, who was sent to Auschwitz from the Litzmannstadt ghetto in Poland and now lives in the United States, noted that “[i]t is our mutual obligation, that of survivors and national leaders, to instill in the current and future generations the understanding of what happens when virulent prejudice and hatred are allowed to flourish” and that “[w]e must all teach our children tolerance and understanding at home and in school...[a]nd that we must make it clear that hate is never right and love is never wrong”; and

Whereas, During the commemoration, NYC philanthropist Ronald Lauder, speaking on behalf of the Pillars of Remembrance, the individual donors to the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, remarked that “[a]ll countries must make hate a crime” and that “[w]orld silence leads to Auschwitz...[w]orld indifference leads to Auschwitz...[w]orld anti-Semitism leads to Auschwitz”; and

Whereas, NYC is currently home to 1.6 million Jews, more than in any other city worldwide; and

Whereas, NYC is home to one of the largest populations of Holocaust survivors in the world, numbering almost 20,000 individuals, with about 80 percent living in Brooklyn; and

Whereas, For Jewish New Yorkers who have a family history that includes survivors or victims of the Nazi concentration and extermination camps, January 27 is a significant anniversary every year; and

Whereas, January 27, 2025, marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and all that it came to mean to the Jewish people the world over as well as to the Allied nations who fought valiantly and defeated the Nazis; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York recognizes January 27, 2025, as the 80th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp and commemorates January 27 annually as Auschwitz Remembrance Day in the City of New York to honor the memories of the over one million Jews and tens of thousands of others who died brutally there at the hands of Nazis during World War II.

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