



Polish prisoners to renovate Jewish historical sites

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The Polish government and a local Jewish organization have signed an unprecedented cooperation agreement under which prison inmates will help to refurbish Jewish historical sites throughout the country.

The deal was inked on Friday between Poland's Central Board of Prisons Service and the Warsaw-based Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland, and is believed to be the first of its kind in Europe.

It will make use of funds provided to Poland by the European Union under a program which sponsors a variety of projects for those serving time in the correctional system.

Inmates from 85 Polish jails are expected to take part.

"The agreement is based on the idea that prisoners will help to maintain and fix up Jewish cemeteries and other historical Jewish sites as part of their rehabilitation process," Foundation CEO Monika Krawczyk told *The Jerusalem Post*.

"It will also involve an educational component, such as teaching them about Jews and Jewish history in Poland," she added.

The idea behind the program arose after the Polish Prisons Service and its Israeli counterpart agreed several months ago to cooperate in jointly restoring the Jewish cemetery in the city of Radom, 100 km. south of Warsaw.

"After that initiative was launched, we thought: Why limit it to Radom? Why not do it more generally throughout Poland?" explained Krawczyk, whose foundation is responsible for more than 1,100 Jewish cemeteries across the country, many of which are in dire need of repair.

"I think this agreement is a good and very constructive example to follow, because it is based on respect for history but is also directed to the future," she said.

The refurbishing of Jewish burial grounds will be carried out under the supervision of the Polish Rabbinical Commission on Cemeteries, which is headed by Polish Chief Rabbi Michael Schudrich.

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