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Photo by: REUTERS

Memory of Poland's Jan Karski, early reporter of the Holocaust, honored

By SAM SOKOL
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Karski, who died in 2000, was the Polish resistance fighter who brought the news of the destruction of European Jewry to the West.

Academics from around the world gathered in Zamosc, Poland, on Wednesday and Thursday to celebrate the memory of Jan Karski, the Polish resistance fighter who brought the news of the destruction of European Jewry to the West.

The event, "Jan Karski – Witness, Emissary, Man," was organized under the aegis of the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland in collaboration with the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin and the Union of Jewish Communities in Poland.

The Polish resistance chose Karski (1914-2000), a former worker in the Polish Foreign Ministry, to bring reports of Nazi atrocities to the attention of prime minister Wladyslaw Sikorski, who was in exile in London.

Karski arranged to be smuggled into the Warsaw Ghetto on two occasions.

It was largely thanks to his efforts that word of the Holocaust reached Western ears in 1942 and 1943.

"This conference is especially important to the ministry, because Karski was a Polish diplomat and a heroic emissary of the Polish underground who brought news of the fate of Jews in Poland to the Polish government in exile and the free world," Dr. Sebastian Rejak, the Polish foreign minister's plenipotentiary for relations with the Jewish Diaspora, said at this week's event.

"Jan Karski was imbued with what Thomas Mann called 'the spirit of nobility,' declared Dr. Laurence Weinbaum of the World Jewish Congress. Weinbaum, who is the editor of the Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs, studied under Karski at Georgetown in the 1980s.

Karski, he said, "was a modest man who would not have been happy that he was the center of so much attention, that he had come to be regarded as a hero, and above all, that some people were actually creating a cult of personality around his name... On the other hand, he would have been very proud, however, of the younger generation of Polish historians who have not recoiled from exposing the most painful and disgraceful episodes in Poland's wartime history. Professor Karski would have regarded them as the most noble and courageous sons and daughters of the Polish nation," Weinbaum said.



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