



Republic of Poland
Minister of Foreign Affairs
Stefan Meller

Warsaw, April 28, 2006

Dear Dr. Samuels,

It is with great sorrow and concern that I read your letter of April 26 sent via e-mail, and made public on the Internet site of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre. My sorrow is all the more profound that I have, for many years, observed with respect and appreciation the activities of the Founder of your institution, the late dr. Wiesenthal, whom I had the honor to know personally.

Fighting all manifestations of anti-Semitism, but also other forms of racism or xenophobia, is a serious challenge to governments, including the Government of the Republic of Poland. We are doing our best to perform this obligation. The ministry I am heading, has for years been active in this area: by publishing books and brochures, by running exchange programs with various Jewish groups and organizations, and, last but not least, by paying particular attention to places of memory – meqomot ha-zekher – and monuments dedicated to a common centuries-old history of Poles and Jews.

The issue you mentioned in your letter is a very specific and complex one. In Poland, as, for that matter, in France or in the USA, the state is strictly separated from churches and religious associations, which makes it impossible for national authorities to intervene in the domain of religious service, its form and content. Moreover, any such intervention would violate not only Polish but also international law which stipulates respect for freedom of conscience and confession of all citizens.

The rituals of the Passion Mystery, celebrated in Kalwaria Zebrzydowska on Good Friday each year, have a four-hundred-year-old tradition and constitute an important element of popular Catholic religiosity in Poland.

I am deeply convinced that the authors and directors of the Passion Mystery did not intend to hurt anyone's feelings. If, however, anyone might have been offended because of any elements present during this religious celebration, I express my deep personal regret. I do hope that there will be no base for any misunderstandings of this kind in the future.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Shimon Samuels
Director for International Relations
Simon Wiesenthal Centre – European Office