**Bronisław Komorowski**

**President of the Republic of Poland**

Dear President

Dear Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is impossible to understand the history of Poland without knowledge of the history of Polish Jews. The reason is not just the centuries of Jewish presence in Polish lands, but also the significant role played by the Jewish community in many spheres of Polish life: in economy, culture and in science.

It is equally impossible to understand the history of Jews without knowledge of Polish history. The reason is not just the centuries of mutual diffusion of the Jewish and Polish worlds and not just the centuries of being neighbours, but also the fact that by the end the 18th century, when Poland was about to disappear from the maps, a vast majority of European Jews lived within its borders.

The reason is also the fact that Polish Jews played a major role in the building of the State of Israel. Indeed, nearly half of all MPs in the first Knesset spoke Polish.

For these reasons it gives me a sense of great satisfaction to be able to open, together with the President of Israel, Mr Reuwen Riwlin, the permanent exhibition of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews. It is truly special to take part in the making of history, as we are not just connecting with the centuries-long Polish-Jewish relationship, but also providing a stimulus for the future of Polish-Jewish and Polish-Israeli relations.

This museum constitutes an eloquent sign of change that has been occurring ever since Poland won its freedom 25 years ago. Indeed, without Polish freedom this museum would not have been possible in its present form. One of the central themes in our drive to freedom was to put right the account of history that had been corrupted, manipulated and distorted in so many ways during the non-democratic communist era. This effort was badly needed with respect to the entire modern history of Poland, including the history of Polish Jews and Polish-Jewish relations. In a free and democratic Poland, in a Poland of victorious systemic transformation, a comprehensively successful nation, we have been deliberately setting in motion processes to tear down shrouds of silence and distortion surrounding relationships with our neighbours. We are deliberate and consistent in pushing towards dialogue, reconciliation and cooperation with our neighbours to overcome even the most awkward episodes of our history. For people of the Solidarity generation this is an obvious process. The logic of the Solidarity world-view is compatible with a consistent drive to elevate the rank of Polish-Jewish relations and to restore positive emotions between us.

I am glad to be opening the Museum’s exhibition under its wonderful name Polin. Polin means “here you will rest”, which was how Jews referred to Poland in Hebrew. And not without reason. For centuries the multinational, multi-religious and tolerant Poland was a safe haven and a generally friendly place. It shone as an exception on the map of Europe. The downfall of the Polish state, it’s partitioning in the late 18th century, put an end also to that Polin.

Restored in 1918, the new Poland was not free from the ills that characterised Europe at large. Just as in nearly all of Europe, our country showed symptoms of infatuation with nationalism, breeding xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

Still, we must remember that Jewish life thrived in Poland even then. More than three million Jews made up their own veritable universe. Dozens of Jewish MPs sat in the Polish Parliament. Jewish artists contributed to the cultural life of the newly independent state. This lush and colourful world, rich in its diversity, was destroyed by the Second World War and annihilated in the Holocaust at the hands of Nazi Germany.

In the collective Jewish memory Poland has become primarily a gigantic cemetery of their nation. The black cape of mourning and sadness has covered the memory of the lush multinational life. It is with this image that in Poland, in Israel and in the diaspora grew new generations that lacked adequate knowledge about the world before the Holocaust.

This museum offers an opportunity to restore the right proportions, to bring back the memory of Jewish life in Poland as opposed to just the remembrance of death and suffering.

Importantly, it is also offering an opportunity to strengthen the much-needed reflection on every evil that has cast a painful shadow on Polish-Jewish relations. It offers a chance to give additional depth to a democratic process that confronts society with difficult and awkward problems: with the history of anti-Semitism, with indifference to the crimes of the Holocaust, with wartime and post-war pogroms and with the persecution of March 1968. The Museum also reminds us that the deeds of good people stand out in every hell. I take this opportunity to give thanks for the initiative to build the monument “From Those – You Saved” near the Polin Museum. It will remind us of the thousands of Poles who saved Jews during the Holocaust and of the at least hundreds of those who died, often together with their nearest and dearest, for their efforts to assist Jews.

Only these parallel tales of greatness and smallness, of heroism and cowardice, of sacrifice and crime can bring the idea of Polin back again.

Dear President,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In 2002, Shimon Peres, then the Foreign Minister of Israel and Chairman of the International Honorary Committee of the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, uttered the memorable words:

“If I were to summarise Jewish-Polish relations throughout history then, without forgetting moments of bitterness and tragic downfalls, I feel gratitude for Poland. For a very long time, Poland, to Jews, was home.”

The Museum of the History of Polish Jews is the sign of our mutual Polish-Jewish gratitude. I am confident that it will contribute to the rebuilding of a world of positive Polish-Jewish emotions. That it will be a place of wise dialogue and an instrument for restoring historic memory to its full dimension.

I hereby congratulate all the creators and thank all the benefactors of the Museum. May this unique institution, that shines light into our rich past, render a new meaning to our future Polish-Jewish and Polish-Israeli relations.