

## Polish PM visits grave of Nazi collaborators, drawing fresh ire

Hours after saying that Jews also perpetrated the Holocaust, Mateusz Morawiecki lays wreath at Munich memorial for far-right WWII fighters

By **TAMAR PILEGGI** ✓

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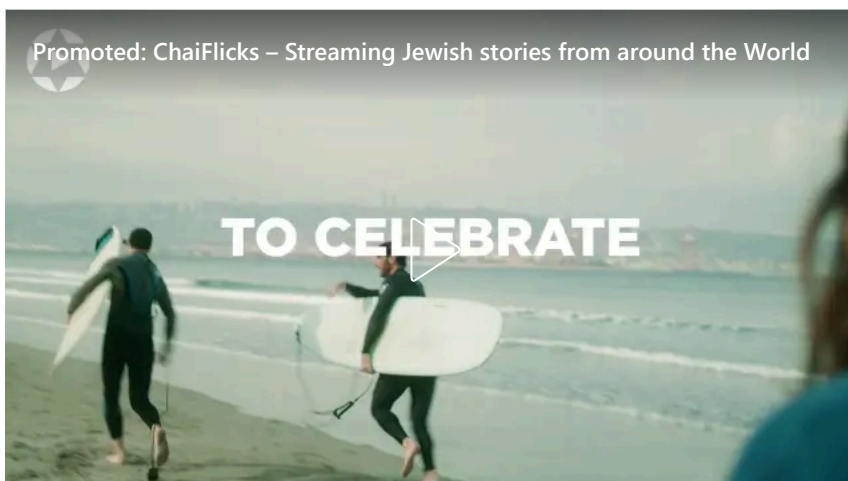


Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki gives a press conference with the German Chancellor on February 16, 2018 at the Chancellery in Berlin. (AFP Photo/John MacDougall)

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki drew fresh criticism on Saturday for paying his respects at the grave of Polish fighters who collaborated with Nazi Germany during World War II, hours after sparking outrage for claiming that [Jews were involved in perpetrating the Holocaust](#).

The Polish prime minister's office on Saturday tweeted a photo of Morawiecki with his hands clasped at the grave of fighters from a Polish underground military unit, known as the Holy Cross Mountains Brigade. He lit a candle and laid a wreath at the Munich grave site.

The unit, which was rooted in a far-right prewar political movement, had also fought Germans. For tactical reasons, it collaborated with the Germans late in the war to focus on fighting communists, who were laying the groundwork for what would be decades of Soviet-backed rule.



An anti-racism group in Poland, Never Again, said it was "appalled" by Morawiecki's visit to the grave.

Jan Grabiec, spokesman for Poland's main opposition party, Civic Platform, criticized both Morawiecki's words in Munich and graveside visit, saying they contributed to Poland's worsening international image.

Earlier on Saturday, Morawiecki drew outrage in Israel for saying that alongside Poles, Jews were also responsible for perpetrating the Holocaust.

Morawiecki was rejecting criticism of a new law that criminalizes mentions of Polish complicity in the Holocaust at the Munich Security Conference, when he was asked by an Israeli journalist if sharing his family's history of persecution in Poland would be outlawed under the new legislation.

"Of course it's not going to be punishable, [it's] not going to be seen as criminal to say that there were Polish perpetrators, as there were Jewish perpetrators, as there were Russian perpetrators, as there were Ukrainian; not only German perpetrators," he told Yedioth Ahronoth's Ronen Bergman.

Morawiecki said the law aimed to prevent falsely attributing Nazi crimes in Poland under Nazi occupation to Polish government policy at the time. He said that last year Polish embassies had to respond 260 times to statements referring to "Polish death camps."

He said the Polish people generally aided their "Jewish brothers and sisters" during the war, and the lines between Holocaust victims and perpetrators was becoming increasingly blurred.

His comments were met with [fierce backlash in Israel](#), with some politicians accusing Morawiecki of anti-Semitism, setting off a new chapter in an angry dispute over the legislation.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who also attended the Munich conference, [called his Polish counterpart's comment "outrageous."](#)

"There is a problem here of lack of understanding of history and lack of sensitivity to the tragedy of our people," Netanyahu said, adding that he planned to speak with Morawiecki soon.

Yair Lapid, head of the opposition Yesh Atid party, said Israel should recall its ambassador immediately in Morawiecki's comments, which he called "anti-Semitism of the oldest kind."

"The perpetrators are not the victims. The Jewish state will not allow the murdered to be blamed for their own murder," said Lapid, the son of a Holocaust survivor.

Labor Party leader Avi Gabbay said the remark made Morawiecki sound like a Holocaust denier.

"The blood of millions of Jews cries from the earth of Poland over the distortion of history and the escape from blame. Jews were murdered in the Holocaust and Poles took an active part in their murder," Gabbay said. "The government of Israel has to be a voice for the millions of murdered and strongly denounce the Polish prime minister's words."



The file picture taken just after the liberation by the Soviet army in January 1945, shows a group of children wearing concentration camp uniforms behind barbed wire fencing in the Oswiecim (Auschwitz) Nazi concentration camp. (AP Photo)

In recent weeks, Israeli officials have sharply criticized the legislation that criminalizes blaming Poland as a nation for crimes committed by Nazi Germany. Israeli critics have accused Poland of seeking to use the law to whitewash the role of some Poles who helped Germans kill Jews during the war. Holocaust scholars estimate that Poles might have either killed or helped Germans kill as many as 180,000 to 200,000 Jews.

Polish authorities say they just want to protect Poland from being depicted as a collaborator of the Nazis when the country was Adolf Hitler's victim and suffered through nearly six years of war and occupation.

*AP contributed to this report.*