The Last Letter From Szmul Zygielbojm, the Bund Representative With the Polish National Council in Exile

May 11, 1943
To His Excellency
The President of the Republic of Poland
Wladyslaw Raczkiewicz
Prime Minister
General Wladyslaw Sikorski

Mr. President,
Mr. Prime Minister,

I am taking the liberty of addressing to you, Sirs, these my last words, and through you to the Polish Government and the people of Poland, and to the governments and people of the Allies, and to the conscience of the whole world:
The latest news that has reached us from Poland makes it clear beyond any doubt that the Germans are now murdering the last remnants of the Jews in Poland with unbridled cruelty. Behind the walls of the ghetto the last act of this tragedy is now being played out.
The responsibility for the crime of the murder of the whole Jewish nationality in Poland rests first of all on those who are carrying it out, but indirectly it falls also upon the whole of humanity, on the peoples of the Allied nations and on their governments, who up to this day have not taken any real steps to halt this crime. By looking on passively upon this murder of defenseless millions tortured children, women and men they have become partners to the responsibility.
I am obliged to state that although the Polish Government contributed largely to the arousing of public opinion in the world, it still did not do enough. It did not do anything that was not routine, that might have been appropriate to the dimensions of the tragedy taking place in Poland.
Of close to 3.5 million Polish Jews and about 700,000 Jews who have been deported to Poland from other countries, there were, according to the official
figures of the Bund transmitted by the Representative of the Government,**
only 300,000 still alive in April of this year. And the murder continues without
end.
I cannot continue to live and to be silent while the remnants of Polish Jewry,
whose representative I am, are being murdered. My comrades in the Warsaw
ghetto fell with arms in their hands in the last heroic battle. I was not permitted
to fall like them, together with them, but I belong with them, to their mass
grave.
By my death, I wish to give expression to my most profound protest against
the inaction in which the world watches and permits the destruction of the
Jewish people.
I know that there is no great value to the life of a man, especially today. But
since I did not succeed in achieving it in my lifetime, perhaps I shall be able by
my death to contribute to the arousing from lethargy of those who could and
must act in order that even now, perhaps at the last moment, the handful of
Polish Jews who are still alive can be saved from certain destruction.
My life belongs to the Jewish people of Poland, and therefore I hand it over to
them now. I yearn that the remnant that has remained of the millions of Polish
Jews may live to see liberation together with the Polish masses, and that it
shall be permitted to breathe freely in Poland and in a world of freedom and
socialistic justice, in compensation for the inhuman suffering and torture
inflicted on them. And I believe that such a Poland will arise and such a world
will come about. I am certain that the President and the Prime Minister will
send out these words of mine to all those to whom they are addressed, and
that the Polish Government will embark immediately on diplomatic action and
explanation of the situation, in order to save the living remnant of the Polish
Jews from destruction.
I take leave of you with greetings, from everybody, and from everything that
was dear to me and that I loved.

S. Zygielbojm

* Zygielbojm committed suicide early on the morning of May 12, 1943.
** Authorized representative with full powers in the Polish Underground on behalf of the Polish Government-in-Exile in London.