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Conference discusses anniversary of the infamous Katyn Forest Massacre



About 70 years ago at a place in Europe known as Katyn Forest and three other sites, over 22,000 Polish officers, prisoners of war, and members of the Polish leading elite were slain. For years, the massacre was subject to a massive cover up.

Initially the Soviet Union blamed the Nazis for the massacre, saying that the killings took place in 1941 when the territory was in German hands. It was not until 1990 that the Russian government admitted that the executions actually took place in 1940 and were carried out by the Soviet secret police. In 1990, Russian prosecutors launched a

criminal investigation into the massacre, but the case was terminated in 2004, and it looked like the tragedy would once again be subject to "historical amnesia."

Katyn has taken on a new significance owing to the crash last spring of an airplane carrying the President of Poland and 95 other high level delegates, who perished on the way to a memorial event to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the massacre in western Russia. In the months following the crash, the Russian government handed over to the Polish government 87 files of its investigation into the 1940 killings.

With these events as backdrop, Case Western Reserve University School of Law recently hosted an important international conference inspired by the infamous Katyn Forrest Massacre. The conference was presented by the Frederick K. Cox International Law Center and Libra Institute, Inc. and was titled, "Katyn: Justice Delayed or Justice Denied?"

Based on the discussions, the Cox Center is producing an "Experts Report," containing recommendations for next steps concerning accountability for the Katyn massacre, which will be published in the fall issue of the Case Western Journal of International Law. Proposals that were debated included Congressional legislation on Katyn, modeled on legislation concerning the genocide of the Armenians; criminal prosecutions of perpetrators; civil law suits filed against Russia in US and European Courts; and adoption of a resolution on Katyn by the UN Human Rights Council of UN General Assembly.

The conference attendees brought expertise on the history and facts behind the Katyn massacre and whether it rises to the level of "genocide." A highlight of the symposium was the keynote speech by Stephen Rapp, U.S. Ambassador at Large for War Crimes Issues and former Chief Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone. The conference also featured presentations by Congressman Dennis Kucinich and Congresswomen Marcy Kaptur. Other speakers included Polish and Russian prosecutors, former U.S. State Department and international organization officials, and leading academics in the field. U.S. Senator Sherrod Brown also provided his comments in a video presentation.

MEDIA CONTACT INFO

Carolyn L. Widdowson
School of Law Media Relations
Specialist
carolyn.widdowson@case.edu
216.368.3018

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