

**MILWAUKEE JEWISH COUNCIL, INC.**

STATEMENT ON THE CARMELITE CONVENT ISSUE

September 13, 1989

The presence of a Carmelite convent on the perimeter of the Auschwitz death camp has been a deep source of concern to the Jewish community for five years. An agreement to remove the convent and to assure that there be no permanent place of worship at Auschwitz was negotiated and signed by leaders of the European Jewish and Catholic communities in 1987. Among the nine Catholic signatories were four cardinals, including Polish Cardinal Francisczek Macharski and three other leading Poles.

The agreement, which stipulated that the convent be moved by February 1989, has yet to be realized. Jewish-Catholic relations have suffered as a result. Particularly painful is the justification of the abrogation of the agreement by the Primate of Poland, Jozef Cardinal Glomp. The statements he chose to support his position are laced with the historic words of anti-Semitism when he asserts that Jewish "pronouncements against the nuns offend the feelings of all Poles," and that Jewish "power lies in the mass media" easily at the disposal of Jews.

The negotiated agreement incorporates the concerns of both Catholics and Jews, recognizing the profound sensitivities that inhere in this issue. Solidarity has joined Catholic leadership, including Cardinals in Europe and in the United States, in unequivocally endorsing that agreement and in condemning the anti-Semitic comments of Cardinal Glomp.

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Here in Milwaukee, Archbishop Rembert Weakland's history of commitment to furthering Catholic-Jewish understanding was reflected in his recent statement, "We all regret very much Cardinal Glemp's uncalled for and harmful comments." We in the Milwaukee Jewish community realize that these events do not represent the feelings of most Catholics. Yet we are profoundly troubled that the demand to renegotiate the agreement continues, and that it is draped in provocative and painful language.

At the same time, we recognize that the Catholic-Jewish relations agenda, both internationally and in the United States, is a very broad one. MJC believes that it would be a tragedy, for Jews and Catholics alike, if the convent issue were allowed to destroy a quarter century of productive contacts on virtually every front between Catholics and Jews. MJC will try to keep the convent issue from being the single issue over which a rupture in the relationship could occur. We also do not condone trespasses that violate the rights and religious sensitivities of those currently in the convent, or physical abuse of trespassers. Additionally, MJC views calls for a travel boycott to Poland as regrettable.

The Jewish community is well aware of the historic developments taking place in Poland, and we applaud those developments. The Catholic Church of that country is playing a key role in the movement toward democracy that we are now witnessing. Indeed, a clear manifestation of these emerging democratic values is the strong repudiation by Solidarity of anti-Semitism from any source. We rejoice with the people of Poland and stand by them in their drive for democracy.

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The Milwaukee Jewish Council hopes that the spirit of democratic renewal in Poland will contribute toward the solution of the Auschwitz convent issue. We call upon leaders of the Catholic Church, both within and outside Poland, including the Vatican, to uphold by the 1987 agreement, to repudiate even the hint of anti-Semitism, and certainly statements that appear to appeal to latent anti-Semitism. Finally, MJC remains convinced that mutual respect between individuals and faith communities is crucial for resolving this issue.