

September 11, 2011

Today, in Kielce, Olsztyn, Krakow, Wroclaw, Warsaw, and dozens of other Polish cities and towns, Poles and Americans will come together to commemorate the 10th anniversary of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC. These commemorations are a testament to the close ties that bind Poland and the United States. For centuries, Poles and Americans have stood together when freedom has been threatened. At no time was this solidarity more evident than in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks.

In their moment of tragedy ten years ago, Americans looked to one other for consolation and support. They also looked to the international community. No country responded more quickly or decisively than Poland. Poles are no strangers to adversity. Nor are you strangers to overcoming adversity, as your history and heroism so aptly demonstrate.

In the days and weeks after September 11th, you stood by a grateful American nation. You showed solidarity not just with candles and flowers, but also by supporting international efforts to combat terrorism and violent extremism, and by working with the United States and other Allies to promote universal values, stability, and economic opportunity around the world. In so doing, you sent a clear message that Poles and Americans will continue to stand together to defend our cherished values and ideals.

Today's commemorations honor the citizens of 90 countries who perished in the September 11 attacks, among them six Poles. These commemorations are also a testament to the ways in which individual communities and the global community have come together in the wake of terrorist attacks since September 11. From Bali to Belfast, Mumbai to Madrid, and Lahore to London, we have time and again witnessed the human spirit triumph over hatred and extremism. These commemorations celebrate the resilience of peoples and nations bound together by universal values and common faith in the human spirit – of people who reject violence in favor of human dignity.

The world has changed dramatically since September 11th. Thanks to the resilience and collective resolve of the international community, terrorists and violent extremists have failed to achieve their goals. We have shown that we are stronger than fear. Rather than being paralyzed by the violent actions of an angry few, people around the world have continued to build better futures for themselves and their children, and have helped their neighbors do the same. In recent months, aspiring democrats in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria have shown similar resilience. And they have looked to Poland for inspiration as they work to defeat extremism and topple tyrannical regimes.

As we pause to honor the victims of the 9/11 attacks, let us be heartened by the knowledge that our spirit is strong and our resolve is unwavering. Let us celebrate our resilience and our solidarity. And let us re-affirm our commitment to protect freedom and to ensure that the blessings of liberty are enjoyed by people across the globe.