

**Ambassador Feinstein's Remarks for Reception in honor of Agnieszka Holland
June 4, 2012, CMR, 19:00**

Good evening, everyone. First of all, I'd like to thank you all for coming here tonight. Most importantly, I'd like to thank Agnieszka Holland for being with us tonight to receive the U.S. Embassy's Jan Karski Freedom Award.

A couple months ago, President Obama gave a speech at the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC. During his remarks, he spoke about the importance of telling our children about what happened during the Holocaust. While he spoke of tales of sadness and cruelty, he also highlighted acts of bravery and compassion. Among those silver linings, President Obama exhorted his audience:

"Let us also tell our children about the Righteous Among the Nations. Among them was Jan Karski, a young Polish Catholic, who witnessed Jews being put on cattle cars, who saw the killings, and who told the truth."

As many of you know, the President followed up these words by awarding the Presidential Medal of Freedom – America's highest civilian honor – to Jan Karski. This seems all too fitting. Just a few months before President Obama made this announcement at the Holocaust Museum, Agnieszka herself was at the Holocaust

Museum for a special screening of *In Darkness*, encouraging her audience to remember the Righteous Among Nations, just as President Obama did in the same place a few months later.

Agnieszka, I understand that you initially declined to take on this project because you didn't want to do a Holocaust film in English. Speaking for myself, as well as many of my American colleagues, this meant we had to work a lot harder to follow what was going on in the film! Nevertheless, your choice about language indeed portrayed the complex cultural and linguistic landscape, giving foreign audiences an added measure of realism and immediacy.

Agnieszka, I feel like I've gotten to know you quite well over the last couple weeks as I've been reading interviews and reviews of the film. There are a couple things that came out of that reading that really struck me. In one interview you mentioned that Americans enjoyed *In Darkness* because they felt they could relate to Leopold Socha, the main character. At the same time, in another interview you talk about how people in Poland – especially young people – have been very responsive to film and its ability to show complex situations and real moral dilemmas.

For younger generations of Poles and Americans, this may indeed be a discovery. But it's a craft you've honed and mastered over a long and distinguished career. "Kino moralnego niepokoju," as it's called in Polish. It's actually somewhat difficult to translate into English – Cinema of Moral Anxiety, maybe, or Cinema of Moral Distress – it's a tough one for sure. But even if we quibble with the exact translation, the meaning is clear.

Films that fall into the category of "Kino moralnego niepokoju" feature heroes who are faced with tremendously difficult moral dilemmas in which any decision – even the most morally grounded decision – carries tremendous risks and terrible downsides. Think of Leopold Socha from *In Darkness*. If he helps save Jews from the Nazis, he risks his life and that of his family; if he doesn't help them, he's an unwilling accomplice in their deaths. Or think of Solek from *Europa Europa*, a Jew who pretends to be an Aryan German elite to escape the Holocaust. Then there's Jan Palach – the film project that I understand you've just completed in Prague – the Czech student who immolated himself in 1969 as an act of political protest. An act of political protest not only aimed at the communist regime, reactionary and retrenched after it crushed the Prague Spring, but an act of protest against the demoralization he saw in his fellow citizens.

Perhaps that's what best characterizes the heroes in your films. They refuse to become demoralized. Faced with agonizing choices, where their lives and the lives of many others are on the line, they choose humanity, dignity, and solidarity. Just like Jan Karski.

The Embassy's Jan Karski Award recognizes Poles who have made outstanding political or social contributions on behalf of democracy, human rights, and freedom. You know, I smiled when I saw that *In Darkness* was dedicated to Marek Edelman, because Marek Edelman received our Jan Karski Freedom Award three years ago, shortly before he passed away in 2009. So I feel that we're carrying on an important tradition. Agnieszka, your characters tell Marek Edelman's story. They tell Jan Karski's story, who brought word of the Holocaust to the West because he hoped to stop it. *In Darkness* illustrates just what it was he was trying to stop.

It also illustrates the possibility for a brighter future. Audiences in both Poland and America are able to see themselves in Leopold Socha; neither a sinner nor a saint, but rather a regular guy who made incredibly brave choices in an incredibly difficult situation. At the same time, audiences in both Poland and America are able to see that different people with different languages are fully capable of living

side by side – as we know from Lwów’s long history as a multicultural city – and they’re also able to see how easily and how tragically that diversity can be twisted into a rationale for hatred and violence.

Thankfully, we’ve come a long way in rooting out the attitudes and prejudices that made the Holocaust possible. For today’s Americans and Poles, few will confront the kind of dilemmas faced by Leopold Socha. Not to mention Jan Karski. But that’s just the point. We don’t want to find ourselves in that kind of situation ever again. That’s why it’s so important to embrace tolerance now, and films like *In Darkness* help us do that. They remind us of the horrors we wish to avoid, while giving us the opportunity to look into ourselves and into our own societies to see where intolerance might be lurking; it’s a preemptive strike against hatred, on behalf of human dignity.

And so it’s with great pride that I present to you the U.S. Embassy’s Jan Karski Freedom Award.