

Translation from Yiddish.

Strictly confidential.

Vilno, 20th March, 1940.

Mr. M. W. Beckelman,
Vilno.

Dear Sir,

As you know there is now in Vilno a group of ab. 60 Jewish writers and journalists, refugees from Poland, mostly from Warsaw.

On the initiative of a friend, whom you know too, this group of writers started an important and responsible work; as there are now in Vilno refugees from all Jewish centres in Poland, and new refugees are arriving constantly, we decided to collect material about the downfall of the Polish Jewry.

The plan of our activity is:

1/To fix in chronological order what has happened to the Polish Jewry since the outbreak of the war up to the present moment.

2/To fix the number of victims and the material losses among the Jewish population in the Jewish centres in Poland for the whole period of time.

3/To draw up thoroughly checked on lists of Jews killed during the bombardments and fires, or tortured to death by the enemies.

4/To fix the details and the results of mass-deportations of Jews ordered by the enemies in a number of towns.

5/To examine the further fate of the expelled Jews.

6/To get information about the sufferings of Jews in the concentration camps.

7/To describe the policy of violence carried on by the Germans with respect of Jews in the occupied territories.

With the consent of the above friend, a special Committee of writers was set up to do this work.

At the beginning of November 1939, a special office in premises of its own has been organized, and the work is carried on systematically up to the present day.

The manager of the office is a well-known Jewish writer; 9 Jewish journalists, former editors and contributors of all the Jewish daily newspapers in Warsaw, are working in the Committee. They represent all political parties of the Jewry; thus, the objective character of the work is being preserved.

The work is carried on in the following way:

On the basis of lists of refugees, now in Vilno, we ask every day several refugees to visit our offices; we choose them according to towns and localities they are coming from. The invited persons give evidence, and on the basis of their accounts special records are drawn, signed by the resp. person after the statement has been read to him. Information given by every witness is being controlled by statements made by other persons from the same locality. We retain also documents which may be interesting for our activity, or make copies and photographs of them.

Up to the present day we have taken evidence of ab. 400 persons /rab- bis, members of Kehillah's and Municipal Councils, leaders of economic and professional organizations, people active in the cultural field, lawyers, physicians etc. /Three hundred records are ready, consisting of 4000 typed sheets. You are already in possession of a part of these documents.

On the basis of these records, short reports about the "Situation of Jewish centres in Poland in time of war in 1939" are made. You are in possession of a certain number of these reports too.

Further, on the basis of records we are preparing bulletins, which give a complete picture of events in a given town, or deal in detail with a particular problem. We have sent you already 6 of such bulletins.

Besides, you are in possession of several photographs of important documents. The remaining records and documents are being typed, and you will receive them in the near future.

As we want our material to be quite complete, we are working now at full speed and we are taking evidence of more and more persons. F.I:600 well-known Jewish personalities were shot in Przemyśl; we know the names of several dozens of them, but we are working to get all the other names too. The crimes committed against hundreds of thousands of Jews are unprecedented in modern history; information about them in the press were not exact, very often untrue; we have nothing to do with such reports. Our aim is to have detailed evidence, like in a legal inquest, reports of an extreme accuracy, documents with figures and names, thoroughly verified.

People with news and documents about the situation of Jews in the occupied areas are arriving the whole time; the examination of the above provides us with important material illustrating the persecutions of Jews and the decrees which are enacted from time to time and which are aiming at the extermination of millions of Jews in a part of the occupied territories. We are also endeavouring to get information about Jewish communities in the occupied areas which did not suffer from the war operations and from special persecutions; we want to know what is going on with the Jews in these places.

To our regret, we are obliged to do our work in very difficult circumstances. We want to point out those difficulties which concern your organization.

When we started the work, our common friend has not fixed a regular budget for us; each month we had to negotiate, and we did not know whether we would be able to pay the very modest remuneration for this responsible

and exhausting work.

We have not received as yet the balance of our February budget. In March, the whole staff is working without being certain of its remuneration. We are stressing this not from the point of view of personal interests, but simply from the standpoint of our activity and of your interests. The expenses of our budget intend also to provide for the sums we pay for stationary, typewriting, rent etc.

The significance of the material we collect is, in our opinion, as follows:

1/The material gives the possibility to learn in detail what is the fate of the several millions of Polish Jews.

2/It will be usefull for the future historical searcher who will write the history of Jews in the present terrible period.

3/The material may be used as a weapon in the fight against the oppressors and persecutors.

4/It will be used as a foundation of the demands of the Jewish nation at the future peace-conference.

Therefore, we consider it as necessary to approach you with the following requests:

1/To provide our office with a fixed budget of 3500 - 5000 Lits a month, so that we might continue our work in a quite and normal way, and even extend it.

2/To accelerate the publication of materials we are transmitting you; first of all the Bulletins should be published in Jewish, French, English and German, edited by a responsible Jewish organization, maybe in collaboration with similar non-Jewish organizations. Later on, symposiums of the most important records should be published.

We allow ourselves to ask you to have this matter clarified with your head-office in New York, and to give us an answer at your earlier convenience.

You will also recall that our whole work is of the most confidential nature. In the press there should not be any word about our office and the persons that are working in it; when publishing the materials, it should not be mentioned that they are coming from Lithuania.