

Reagan's Visit To German Military Cemetery Protested

NEW YORK — A score of non-Jewish religious and ethnic groups have joined veteran and Jewish organizations in protesting President Reagan's visit to the German military cemetery at Bitburg, where 47 Waffen SS soldiers are among its 2,000 dead.

Commenting on the numerous expressions of support by Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian, Italian, Black, Hispanic and Asian national and local organizations, Howard I. Friedman, President of the American Jewish Committee, stated that "reactions over the last few days from Americans of many backgrounds and faiths have reinforced our conviction that the Bitburg cemetery cannot be an appropriate symbol for reconciliation."

Mr. Friedman cited a number of messages sent by leaders of the non-Jewish groups to President Reagan, including one from Arie R. Brouwer, general secretary, National Council of Churches of Christ, USA:

"We view with dismay your decision to make an official visit to Bitburg Cemetery. A visit to the cemetery where Nazi war criminals are buried exacerbates wounds rather than heals them. We ask you to reconsider this unfortunate decision so that the world may know this nation's total disdain for the policy that produced the Nazi Holocaust."

Dr. Eugene Fisher, director of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops Secretariat for Christian-Jewish Relations, praised President Reagan's decision to commemorate the Holocaust during his trip to West Germany, but added the decision did not resolve "the real question: Why is he going to go and pay tribute to the Waffen SS?"

"These were not just kids drafted into the army," Dr. Fisher said, "but an elite corps whose ideology was to kill the innocent."

He added that the Waffen SS "not only butchered Jews but also killed unarmed American

prisoners of war. The Nuremberg court declared them a criminal association."

Aloysius A. Mazewski, President of the Polish American Congress, Inc., told President Reagan:

"Americans of Polish descent are dismayed by your announced decision to attend ceremonies in memory of German soldiers, including members of the notorious SS division, killed in World War-II, while declining to pay tribute to the countless victims of the Nazi-German Holocaust."

Matthew G. Nizza, Chairman of the Commission for Social Justice of the New York Order of Sons of Italy in America, stated that "to honor the graves in which Nazi SS officers are buried is to pay homage to those who willingly participated in the most infamous act of genocide in the history of our planet."

Mr. Friedman also quoted the following message of support the American Jewish Committee had received from the Rev. Gardner Taylor, pastor of the Concord Baptist Church of Christ in Brooklyn:

"Along with great number of black people we join you in outrage at the visit of President Reagan to the Bitburg Nazi cemetery containing the graves of barbarous mass murderers and criminals against our common humanity."

Mr. Friedman also quoted part of a joint telegram to President Reagan in which leaders of a coalition of white ethnic, Black, Hispanic, and Asian ethnic groups told the President: "We feel that your visit to the military cemetery at Bitburg insulted the memory of the Americans, Europeans and North Africans who died at the hands of the Nazis."

The joint statement continued: "We add our united voice to the chorus of the Jewish people, American veterans organizations, the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, a majority of the United States Senate, including leaders of your own party, and thousands of American families who continue to mourn for fathers, husbands,

brothers and sons slain by the Nazis during World War II."

Among other leaders of national groups who protested President Reagan's visit were Benjamin Hooks, Executive Director, NAACP; Raul Yzaguirre, President, National Council of La Raza; Joseph M. Trevino, Executive Director, League of United Latin American Citizens; S. Andrew Chen, National President, Organization of Chinese Americans; Joseph Tateishi, Redress Director, Japanese Americans Citizens' League; Le Xuan Khoa, Executive Director, Indochina Resource Action Center; John Kromkowski, President, National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs; and Fred Rotondaro, Executive Director, National Italian American Foundation; Andrew Athens, National Chairman, United Hellenic American Congress; Joaquin Avila, President and General Council, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund; Dr. Myron Kuropas, Supreme Vice President, Ukrainian National Association, National Ethnic Liaison, Americans for Human Rights in Ukraine; Anthony O. Fornelli, Past President, UNCIO National; Julian E. Kulas, member, Board of Directors, Ukrainian Congress Committee of America.

Among the local signatories were Stanley Balzekas, Jr., President, Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture; Edwin Cudecki, former Chairperson, Illinois Consultation on Ethnicity in Education; Ross Harano, Chairman, Mayor's Advisory Council on Asian Affairs, City of Chicago, former Midwest District Governor, Japanese American Citizens League.

Others were Mitchell Kobelinski, President, Copernicus Foundation, former President, Polish American Congress; Winston Liang, President Greater Chicago Chapter, Organization of Chinese Americans.

Also joining in the statement were Edward

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