

May 11, 2023

We, the undersigned scholars of the Holocaust Era, the Second World War, and Modern and Jewish History, express our firm support for Professor Barbara Engelking and for academic freedom, in the face of an unbridled and unfounded attack by politicians, media, and other public figures on her and on TVN24, where she was interviewed on April 19. Most of us have known Professor Engelking professionally as a colleague for many years. We can attest to the fact that she is a scholar of impeccable personal and professional integrity. Her scholarship adheres to the highest academic standards, for which she has earned worldwide esteem, as well as honors and awards.

Professor Engelking's scholarly contribution to the study of the Holocaust in Poland, and especially to the study of relations between Poles and their Jewish neighbors at the time and to Jews' struggles to cope and survive, has assumed a central place in academic discourse about those subjects. Her reputation for balance in analyzing historical situations and courage in her willingness to face the most difficult subjects precedes her. Engelking's multi-faceted approach to researching the varied behavior of Poles during the Holocaust, and trying to understand the range of behavior from rescue attempts to participation in murder, meeting the highest academic standards, have made a seminal contribution to the field. Moreover, her research and that of other scholars, along with many survivor and rescuer accounts, have shown that many Jews met with widespread indifference, and often hostility or even violence in wartime Poland. Potential rescuers had their own neighbors to fear more than anyone else, which highlights the rescuers' courage all the more. Indeed, Engelking's findings are supported by a wealth of primary sources. Furthermore, her work is part of a broader research enterprise currently being pursued in a number of countries in trying to come to terms with the difficult enormity of the Holocaust period.

Despite the present climate in Poland that seeks to limit open discussion about Polish society during the Holocaust years, Professor Engelking, along with other academics associated with the Polish Center for Holocaust Research, has exhibited great intellectual and personal courage in researching and publishing her findings.

The current attack on Professor Engelking is an attack not only on her, but on open-minded scholarship that seeks to understand the processes that allowed the Holocaust to take place, and on scholarship that seeks to explore the most painful aspects of human history in as balanced a fashion as possible on the basis of solid documentation.

We express our full support to Professor Engelking against those who seek to besmirch her reputation, demonize her, and curtail her work, and by extension, ours as well.

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