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Stefan Wisniowski
Sydney 0411 864 873

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE (Polish text follows)

Eastern Poland property compensation deadline approaches

WARSAW POLAND, Thursday, Nov 6, 2008 - - Although it has not been widely publicized outside Poland, the deadline is looming for the Polish government's offer of compensation for property left outside its present borders in connection with the Second World War.

This is in not related to restitution for property confiscated in Poland by the German Nazi and post-war Communist regimes. Rather, it is compensation offered for property left behind when Poland's borders were shifted west after the war. Poland's eastern territories were taken over by the Soviet Union in exchange for new western territories taken from a vanquished Germany.

Romuald Lipinski, a soldier in the Polish Army that helped drive the Germans out of Italy and who is now living in Virginia, says "it broke our hearts when our land was lost to the Soviets – we felt totally betrayed by our own Allies. We helped win the war against Hitler but lost our homeland to Stalin. But even though we could never return home after the war, we never forgot our Polish homeland. Now after all these years, we rejoice that Poland is free again and that it has not forgotten us either."

Almost 70 years after the war started, partial justice may finally be restored with the Polish government's compensation offer of twenty percent of the current value of the lost land and buildings. The compensation is funded by the sale of government property. Already nearly \$100 million has been awarded to former residents of the Eastern Borderlands ("Kresy" in Polish) and their families for their lost land and homes.

Deportation survivor and current Florida resident, Marie Gaffney, recalls "The Soviet troopers came with guns drawn in the dead of night and dragged us out into minus 40 degree temperatures, with only a few small bundles of our belongings in my father's hands and me in my mother's arms. They deported us to harsh labour camps in Siberia and seized all our property. Our homes are gone forever, but at least this is a symbolic recognition of the injustice we suffered."

The 8 July 2005 Polish law provides for compensation on an equal basis for all pre-war Polish citizens leaving land outside the present borders of Poland due to circumstances surrounding the 1939-1945 war. This includes the deported families, the soldiers who served in the Polish Forces in the West, and their families who spent the war in refugee camps around the world.

Australian second-generation survivor Louise Blazejowska says: "The story of the Soviet war-time persecution of eastern Poland's residents is a little known episode in the history of World War 2, including mass deportations to "Siberia" that resulted in starvation and death, the seizure of property and the cover-up of the Katyn massacre. But the survivors of those tragic events and their heirs now scattered across the world are to this day in the dark about their rights to justice and compensation for their seized property. They must act now before it is too late."

Applications will be accepted only until the end of 2008. Mandatory preconditions include: owners of the property had to be Polish citizens in 1939 and had to have been living in Poland at that time; owners or their heirs must be Polish citizens now (citizenship can be confirmed if parents were Polish citizens); and inheritance rights have to be proven. Some description of the property must also be provided to determine its value.

Although the initial claim must be lodged in one of Poland's provincial offices by 31 December 2008, any additional supporting evidence can be submitted after the claim is registered, including documents obtained from various archives in Poland, Britain, the US and the former Soviet republics. The Kresy-Siberia Group has organized Polish and English-speaking volunteers to help applicants fill out and lodge their forms as well as with research, translations and navigating through administrative requirements. For more information, or to obtain claim registration forms, potential claimants can e-mail info@kresy-claims.org or visit www.kresy-claims.org.

Kresy-Siberia Group founder Stefan Wisniowski, Canadian-born and now living in Sydney, Australia, says: "For years, many Polish survivors were reluctant to claim money from their homeland as a matter of honor. However, many now understand that things have changed and that as a member of the European Union, Poland is a dynamic western economy that looks after all of its citizens' human rights, including their property rights. Others, who do not feel the need for financial compensation, may chose to donate their compensation payments to a worthy cause, such as the Kresy-Siberia Foundation which is developing a virtual museum on the internet to preserve their history for future generations."

The Kresy-Siberia Group is the international special interest group of over 750 survivors of the Soviet persecutions and their 2nd and 3rd-generation descendants. Its objectives are to research, remember and recognize the persecution of Polish citizens of all ethnic and religious backgrounds by the Soviet Union during the Second World War. As well as supporting property claimants with information and assistance, one of its current projects is developing a state-of-the-art "virtual museum" on the internet to commemorate this little-known chapter of the Second World War.

Media contacts

Australia & New Zealand:

Stefan Wisniowski 61-4-1186-4873 cell

Stefan.Wisniowski@Kresy-Siberia.org

UK:

George Neisser 44-12572-79145 or 44-77379-98123 cell

Jerzy.Neisser@Kresy-Siberia.org

USA & Canada:

Lynda Kraar

1-201-947-2516 or 1-551-486-3772 cell

Lynda.Kraar@Kresy-Siberia.org

Poland:

Aneta Hoffmann

48-502-870-596 cell

Aneta.Hoffmann@Kresy-Siberia.org

Ed. Note:

The "Kresy-Siberia Group" brings into contact people from countries around the world with a special interest in the tragedy of over one million Polish citizens of various faiths and ethnicities (Polish, Ukrainian, Belorussian, Catholic, Orthodox, Jewish, etc.) either deported from eastern Poland (Kresy) in 1940-41 or otherwise arrested and sent to special Soviet labor camps in Siberia, Kazakhstan and eastern Asia. Some 115,000 of these were evacuated through Iran in 1942 as soldiers of Anders Army and their families - and eventually made their way to the West.

The circumstances of their odyssey and the tragic history of the Polish citizens under Soviet Russian occupation during the war were hushed up by the Allies during the war to protect the reputation of the Soviet Union, an important ally in the war against Nazi Germany. Almost seventy years later the survivors have aged and many have died. The group brings together surviving deportees and their descendants to remember, learn, discover and spread the word of their ordeal to the world and to future generations. We can also provide you with "local" interviews.
