



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Jan Karski to Receive Presidential Medal of Freedom

NEW YORK, April 23, 2012 - The Kosciuszko Foundation is pleased to announce that President Obama will award a posthumous Presidential Medal of Freedom to Jan Karski, a former officer in the Polish Underground during World War II who was among the first to provide eyewitness accounts of the Holocaust to the world.

Karski was a long time member of The Kosciuszko Foundation and The American Center of Polish Culture (ACPC), which became heirs of Karski's last will and testament.

On April 7, 2011, Kosciuszko Foundation President Alex Storozynski and Kaya Ploss, former Director of the ACPC, which is now part of the Kosciuszko Foundation, wrote to President Obama asking him to honor Jan Karski "a man of courage and great distinction who was a citizen of Poland, the United States and Israel. As representatives of the two Polish organizations in America that were beneficiaries of Jan Karski's will, and having merged last year, we hope that you would consider awarding Jan Karski the Presidential Medal of Freedom."

The foundation was later joined in the quest by The Jan Karski Centennial Campaign, an initiative of the Polish History Museum in Warsaw. Members of the steering committee that have been pushing the campaign include: Alex Storozynski, President and Executive Director of The Kosciuszko Foundation; Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski, former National Security Advisor to President Jimmy Carter; Robert L. Billingsley, Co-Chair, Georgetown University Jan Karski Centennial Campaign; David Harris, Executive Director, American Jewish Committee; Andrzej Rojek, Kosciuszko Foundation Trustee; and campaign director Wanda Urbanska.

The Medal of Freedom is the Nation's highest civilian honor, presented to individuals who have made especially meritorious contributions to the security or national interests of the United States, to world peace, or to cultural or other significant public or private endeavors.

President Obama said, "We must tell our children about how this evil was allowed to happen-because so many people succumbed to their darkest instincts; because so many

The Kosciuszko Foundation: The American Center of Polish Culture

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others stood silent. But 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, all the way to President Roosevelt himself. Jan Karski passed away more than a decade ago. But today, I'm proud to announce that this spring I will honor him with America's highest civilian honor-the Presidential Medal of Freedom."

Karski served as an officer in the Polish Underground during World War II and carried among the first eye-witness accounts of the Holocaust to the world. He worked as a courier, entering the Warsaw ghetto and the Nazi Izbica transit camp, where he saw first-hand the atrocities occurring under Nazi occupation. Karski later traveled to London to meet with the Polish government-in-exile and with British government officials. He subsequently traveled to the United States and met with President Roosevelt. Karski published *Story of a Secret State*, earned a Ph.D. at Georgetown University, and became a professor at Georgetown's School of Foreign Service. Born in 1914, Karski became a U.S. citizen in 1954 and died in 2000.

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Founded in 1925, the Kosciuszko Foundation promotes closer ties between Poland and the United States through educational, scientific and cultural exchanges. It awards up to \$1 million annually in fellowships and grants to graduate students, scholars, scientists, professionals, and artists, and promotes Polish culture in America. The Foundation has awarded scholarships and provided a forum to Poles who have changed history.

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