Ladies and Gentlemen!

Very soon we will meet the laureates of the 6th edition of POLIN Award. The Award is being presented by the Museum of the History of Polish Jews since 2015. Its aim is to promote actions which are

in line with the Museum’s vision and mission. Every year, POLIN Award laureates are individuals or organizations whose activities aim at the preservation of the memory of history of Polish Jews and who greatly contribute to shaping a common future, mutual understanding and respect between Poles and Jews. This year, we cannot meet you all in person at a formal gala held at POLIN Museum.

We are meeting online, but we will nonetheless take you on a journey to the places where the finalists live and work. It has now become a tradition that on the occasion of the POLIN Award gala we look back and reflect upon what we have managed to achieve over this passing year.

Without a doubt, many of us will forever remember the year 2020 as a time of major challenges. Let us recall the past months at POLIN Museum.

On 16 March 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, POLIN Museum was closed until further notice, and over 180 employees began to work from their homes. Even though none of us was mentally prepared for this situation, we have quickly managed to reconstruct our contact network, we continued to work on our projects that were launched prior to the pandemic, and we developed new ones. At this difficult time, we invited you to tour our unique core exhibition virtually, we organized online Daffodils campaign, we launched our own POLIN Radio station, we organized the International Childrens’ Day at King Matt’s Kingdom, we launched Leśmian’s Meadow in the virtual world, and shared recorded lectures and GEOP conferences online. We organized book premieres and virtual meetings with authors, we taught you all about the Jewish cuisine online as well. Finally, we prepared and opened our new temporary exhibition Here Is Muranów. Museum has never been that empty and quiet before.

And that is how many quiet months have passed at POLIN Museum. We continue to develop and carry out new projects. We modify our existing projects’ formula and we strive to adopt our programs to the ”new reality.” Now I would like to give the floor to Zygmunt Stępiński, Director of POLIN Museum.

Dear all, the circumstances triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic rendered the operation of POLIN Museum as well as many other institutions of culture difficult. They thwarted not only business ctivity across many branches of the economy, but also made realisation of social projects extremely difficult. Such projects have always been and still are vital for POLIN Museum. However, despite the difficult situation, we have received several dozen applications for candidates for 2020 POLIN Award, and it was truly difficult for us to shortlist the finalists out of the lot. I wish to extend my sincere thanks to all the people who contacted us to submit candidates for POLIN Award. It is thanks to you that we are able to promote and support initiatives whose goal is to recall and preserve the memory of the history of Polish Jews. We are most happy to hear that there are so many such initiatives out there, in small towns and small communities. All those who devote their time and energy to pursue POLIN Museum mission deserve our heartfelt gratitude and distinction. Especially that they have been doing it for years now, much longer than POLIN Museum exists. Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to congratulate all the nominees, and to promise you all that we will see you at the POLIN Award gala at the Museum next year. So long until then!

Thank you! Now I would like to give the floor to Katarzyna Wąs, representative of the Jankilevitsch Foundation, patron of the POLIN Award competition.

I would like to welcome you all at the POLIN Award gala on behalf of the Jankilevitsch Foundation. This year in a slightly different format, in the virtual reality, but I hope you will nonetheless

enjoy tonight’s event as much as we do. I wish to congratulate all the nominees and all the laureates. I do hope that next year we will all meet in this distinguished and lovely company live at POLIN Museum. Do enjoy the evening!

Thank you. Ladies and Gentlemen! We have now reached the highlight of this evening. In a moment, we will find out who has been named the laureate of 2020 POLIN Award. Before we do, however, let me introduce you to the jury who has selected the finalists and laureates of this year’s competition: Natalia Bartczak, Michał Bilewicz, Katarzyna Wąs, Marcin Kącki, Łucja Koch, Zuzanna Radzik, Paula Sawicka, Zygmunt Stępiński, Dariusz Stola, Piotr Wiślicki. Just like it happened in the past years, this year the jury was faced with a truly difficult challenge. We received applications from all over Poland, from towns and cities, big and small. We are most grateful for them all, for they testify to the fact that there are more and more social activists among us for whom looking after both tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the Jews from Poland is both a vocation and a mission. Let me introduce you to this year’s finalists.

Justyna Biernat—founder of the Arcades of Memory Foundation. Justyna has been involved in the preservation of the memory of Jews from Tomaszów Mazowiecki both culture and academia for many years now. She runs educational-artistic projects, organizes tours in the area of the former Tomaszów ghetto, writes scholarly texts and remains in close touch with the descendants of Jews from Tomaszów.

In my cultural and scholarly activities I try to decipher traces of the past. I understand the process of deciphering as seeking similarities building relations between what is now, and what has been hidden behind the trace, namely with the Jewish past of Tomaszów Mazowiecki. Jews constituted one-fourth of the total population of Tomaszów in the interwar period. Today the only material vestige of this community is the cemetery. Obviously, there are many more vestiges, albeit non-material ones. These are various testimonies, memoirs, archival documents, family keepsakes. I try to collect all these traces and to share my collection during numerous educational and cultural projects. I have been running the Arcades of Memory Foundation which is engaged in the preservation of the Jewish heritage of Tomaszów Mazowiecki for several years. I run all sorts of workshops as part of my Foundation operation. With the participation of multi-generation groups we discover the Jewish past of Tomaszów and the traces I have mentioned. Together, we produce performances, we write literary texts, and we produce audio-guides. Moreover, I conduct research, I contact the descendants of Tomaszów Jews and I run a bilingual webpage devoted to the history of Jews from Tomaszów. I wish Jews were included in the collective memory of Tomaszów Mazowiecki. I would like Tomaszów to remember its Jews and Jews to remember Tomaszów. I am very keen on a relation that is based on reciprocity. One could say that the activities that I engage in are ephemeral. These are mostly workshops and other projects. Such is the dynamics of social, non-governmental and foundation-related activity. However, I deeply believe that it is precisely by way of these seemingly ephemeral actions, when we hold a discussion in a multi-generational group and establish a common language for a dialogue with one another, as well as with Tomaszów’s Jewish past, we truly preserve the memory of the Jews from Tomaszów. I prefer to focus on the category of memory rather than a category of commemoration.

Karol Głębocki, history and civic studies teacher from Wysokie Mazowieckie, educator at the Wysokie Mazowieckie Region Community Centre. Karol has been active in the field of preservation of the traces of Jewish culture and presence in his hometown for the past 15 years. Aside from teaching his students Polish-Jewish history of their town, Karol also engages them in tidying up the local Jewish cemetery.

We are now at the spot where my journey really began, my adventure with the Jewish culture. I remember when I was a young boy this place did not resemble a cemetery at all. I looked more like a regular woodland. By the way, that is exactly how the local people referred to it: “a Jewish grove.” I used to walk in this cemetery when I was a little boy, I was fascinated by both the utter silence and the writings I did not understand. I reverted to my childhood interest in this wood while at the university. When I was writing my Master thesis on the local parish I came across lots of source materials on Jews. A year later I started working as a teacher and so, for the past sixteen years, I have been talking about it out loud. I think I was the first person in my town since the end of the war, to speak openly about its Jewish past. I started to demand restoring the forgotten Jewish history. I strove to convey my message, to make people aware that, since the second half of the 19th century, Jews constituted the majority in the town and they greatly contributed to its economic and cultural development, which is the fact that some people would most gladly forget. School education is vital here. I teach at the Regional Community Centre. It is a vocational college. While teaching history, history of society, as well as civic science, I put great emphasis on pass the knowledge on the Jewish local past onto my students. In general, I like to teach history by focusing on the local history. I feel this affects young people the most. They read about events in history in their textbooks, and I demonstrate to them that such events took place right here, too. In this specific place. Jews used to live here once, part of the town was turned into a ghetto. I also work as a field tour guide of the Podlaskie Voivodship. I try to provide guided tours to people interested not only in Wysokie Mazowieckie, but in the entire Podlaskie province, and to show them the remaining vestiges of the Jewish past in the region. Since I live in Białystok, I also joined similar activities that are on offer there. I got involved in the Museum of the Jews of Białystok communal project where I publish materials on their webpage. Also, this year I co-authored the exhibition on the shtetls in the Białystok region, as part of an event held to commemorate the 77th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Memory is of utmost importance to me. I do believe that really…. I don’t really know if memory is the first This is truly important, for—as Rabbi Schudrich has once said, Jews were murdered twice. The first time when they perished, the second time when they were deprived of memory. We cannot dream of building a better

future if we do not make our peace with the past. We cannot live solely in the present. That is what I believe moulds us, and that is what I wish to teach my students.

Paweł Kulig has been acting as a caretaker of the New Jewish Cemetery on Bracka Street in Łódź for 8 years now. Since 2019, he has been the Chair of the Guardians of Memory Association whose aim is to preserve the cultural and historic heritage of Łódź Jewry. As the Guardians of Memory Association we engage in all sorts of activities to preserve the historic and cultural heritage of Polish Jews. We carry out all sorts of activities and initiatives, including tidying up the Jewish cemetery in Łódź where we are right now. This is the largest cemetery in Poland, and as such it requires a lot of attention. Aside from looking after the cemetery, we also carry out activities aiming at educating the youth. We remain in touch with the Landsmanschaft in Israel, and we develop activities which aim at building our relations with the descendants of Jews from Łódź. We look after the graves of their ancestors, but we also organize meetings with them and we make sure they are aware that the graves of their greatgrandparents, their heritage, is taken care of. Residents of Łódź participate in the actions of tidying up the cemetery. These are very diverse groups of people. We have seniors joining us as well as young people. Our children, school youth, and also people passionate about the city of Łódź. Łódź owed its prosperity and wealth to the Jewish residents. Here we can see the parents of Arthur Rubinstein who are buried at this cemetery. Here are the parents of Julian Tuwim. We have many more outstanding people who contributed to the success of this city. We feel responsible for the heritage they have left to us. And we do not treat it as an exclusively Jewish heritage, but rather as our joint heritage. If we discard our roots, we are left with no past. We have no past. We need to preserve the memory of our past, for people tend to forget very quickly. We ought to preserve it. That is precisely what we strive to do, not only through tidying up the cemetery, but also through educational actions which aim at sharing the stories of the past with a wide audience, but also to gain our audience’s respect. That is what I do with my children, teaching them respect and awareness of where they come from and where they are heading.

Agnieszka Mysakowska, history teacher at the No. 2 Janusz Korczak High School in Wieluń, and the Leader of Dialogue at Forum for Dialogue. Agnieszka teaches children and youth about the history and culture of Jews who once used to be their neighbours. She also manages the Trail of Wieluń Jews and is the prime mover behind the ceremonies held to commemorate the anniversary of the liquidation of the ghetto in Wieluń. I hope that thanks to my activity people will find out that Wieluń was not such a mono-cultural town it is nowadays — it was colourful, it was multicultural. Jews, Russian Orthodox and Evangelicals used to live here, side by side, in peace and happiness. I want people to remember about history precisely due to this shared past. For this really means something for us. We cannot accept the present without knowing what it was like in the past. And Wieluń was once a really interesting place. My biggest success in commemorating Jewish past...

I have a problem here, because I cannot list one single success. I have two, in fact. Firstly, I managed to convince local authorities to get involved in the process — they are with me at each and every commemoration held in town. Secondly, I managed to convince the descendants of Jews from Wieluń to visit the town. Now they come visit, they take guided tours of the town and vicinity, they are deeply moved and grateful. I don’t really understand why they should be grateful — what I do is so natural and normal, it is by no means special, that I feel slightly embarrassed being served such compliments. I feel that we ought to preserve the memory, for we have no control over the past. We have no such powers. We do have the power to affect the present and the future. Our present and future depend on how much we remember from the past. People react very positively to my endeavours, which I find amazing but also a tad surprising, for I am well aware that it is much easier in larger towns. There are various institutions, Centres for Dialogue. There is no such thing in Wieluń. That is why at the very beginning of my adventure I was very apprehensive. Right now, the fear is completely gone. I am getting positive feedback. People attend commemoration events, they lay flowers, bring memorial stones, and light candles. That is why I am inclined to think that I am heading in the right direction. My dream is to publish a book that has already been written — testimonies of witnesses to history. Alas, some of them passed away. Some are still alive. For me this book is like a monument, a memorial to the Wieluń Jewry as well as to those who survived in order to bear witness.

Mirosław Reczko is a graduate in history and English philology. He is passionate about the history of the Ciechanowiec region. He served three terms as Mayor of Ciechanowiec. For over a dozen years Mirosław has been devoted to restoring the memory of the Jewish residents of the Białystok region through both academic studies and preservation of the tangible heritage of the local Jewish community. Taking into account that people seem to be more and more positive towards Jewish topics, I try to be very active in many corners of my province. We organize meetings, we talk with the people. When I studied in the United States, I had the honour to meet Professor Rabbi Richard Hertz, who was an absolutely unique figure within the community of American Jews. Aside from his activity in the religious sphere, he was also the builder of a beautiful temple in West Bloomfield. He also served as an adviser to US presidents, mainly to Dwight Eisenhower. It was in West Bloomfield that I have first come across the Yizkor Book of Ciechanowiec. Back then, I treated it as if it were one of the holy scriptures. It was something truly special. Years later, I was most happy to be able to participate in translating the book which will be published in Polish in a couple of months. At the same time, I collaborate with editors in the United States who are translating the book into English. My adventure with Memorial Books began precisely then, with the Book of Ciechanowiec. Being a historian, I am of the opinion that one should definitely rely on the facts. Whatever we read or hear in the media, both nowadays and back then, what we can come across in few scholarly publications, these are in the overwhelming majority people’s opinions, not at all based on facts. And even if they are based on facts, the facts are chosen in a very selective way. In order to be able to talk about what really happened, what took place over the long period when Jews resided in the Polish lands, during the Second World War, I am afraid we must search for the facts. Memorial Books are a true mine of such facts. To me, Memorial Books are vital also for purely practical reasons. It is not just about translating them and thus making them accessible to people, it is about inspiring the local community. Aside from the academic dimension, I am also interested in practical matters. These two buildings right here used to serves as synagogues before the war. According to the agreement signed with the Jewish community at a time when I was a town mayor, both buildings were returned, or rather transferred to our local Jewish community of Ciechanowiec and we gradually renovated them with the intent, as agreed with the Jewish community, to accommodate cultural institutions there.

Krotochwile Association—Paweł Bajerlein and Patryk Antoniak with associates and volunteers — have been actively engaged in the preservation of the local Jewish heritage in Wielkopolska. The Association popularises the knowledge on Jewish history and culture by running educational projects addressed to both the youth and adults. In 2020, they launched and completed stage one of works on the inventory of the Jewish cemetery in Koźmin Wielkopolski. The goal of our activities is to make the local community aware of what Koźmin was like in the past. Because Koźmin was a Polish-German-Jewish town. We want the local community to know of this rich heritage, to realize that that all these cultures had a great positive influence on how the town developed. Following a screening of the film titled "Polin. Shreds of Memory" by Jolanta Dylewska a large group of people debated together: "See, at my family home, at my grandma’s, the tradition was exactly the same, people behaved in exact same way". This is how culture helps us demonstrate all these various aspects. People discover that, and at that very moment they realize that their personal view not only on Jews but on multicultural Poland in general is altogether different. I think our greatest success is that the local communities of Jarocin, Koźmin Wielkopolski, Krotoszyn and other towns where we carry out our projects, join in, want to be a part of this. I am talking about schools, but I am also talking about seniors. The truth is that without a cooperation with local communities we wouldn’t be able to achieve much. What I find most important is when the memory, the eagerness to act, to look after a specific site, for example the Jewish cemetery in Koźmin, is the initiative of local residents, and they are actively involved in it. People approach us and our actions with a certain dose of open mind. There are times when we feel that something is not possible to realise that we will surely fail to convince the local authorities to cooperate, that we will face many obstacles on our way. It turns out, however, that many things are in fact possible thanks topeople’s openness, to open heads full of new ideas, for these are not only our ideas, but also of the people with whom we cooperate in Wielkopolska. I think we need to preserve the memory, for as we strive to build our future, when we think about the future, we need to remember about the past; We need to remember about the positive things that happened in the past, but also about the negative ones. Also about the things that we are not really happy to talk about, we try to erase them from our memory. However, without an open talk about the past, without remembering about the diversity, the complexity of our history, we are not able really to look ahead, to look into the future. My greatest dream is to build a place in Wielkopolska, here preferably, somewhere in the immediate vicinity, a centre for cultural education. This centre would embrace the entire multicultural past of this region of Poland by organizing classes for young people, workshops, meetings, all sorts of events and exchanges. I do hope that my dream will come true, and we will manage to create such a place one day.

Ladies and Gentlemen! Please, send your warmest thoughts to all the nominees. They have all been devoting lots of their time and energy to preserve and restore the memory of the history of Polish Jews. Faced with the most difficult task of selecting a winner of this year’s POLIN Award competition, the jury has decided to grant two honourable mentions. The laureate of the first honourable mention will be announced by the sponsor of 2020 POLIN Award competition financial prizes Agata and Avi Ariav, representing the Odette and Nimrod S. Ariav Foundation. We are happy to announce that the honourable mention of this edition of POLIN Award goes to Ms Justyna Biernat for preserving the memory of the Jewish past in Tomaszów Mazowiecki. Congratulations!

Justyna has been presented with a financial award of 10 000 PLN.

The laureate of the second honourable mention will be announced by Ewa Masny-Askanas and Wiktor Askanas, donors of the financial prizes in the POLIN Award competition.

Being part of 2020 POLIN Award competition is a great honour for We also look at it as a duty — dealing with the question of the memory of past generations, of our history, of the history of our home country. People who engage in looking after the cultural heritage sites, who commemorate the history of Polish Jews, deserve our utmost respect, and a reward. By supporting this wonderful initiative yet again we wish to congratulate the nominees and to announce that another honourable mention for promoting and preserving the memory of Polish Jews in Wielkopolska goes to the Krotochwile Association. Congratulations! The Krotochwile Association will also receive a financial award of 10,000 PLN.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in a moment we will all find out who is the winner of 2020 POLIN Award. Who will join the group of the Award laureates to date, namely: Tomasz Pietrasiewicz, Jacek Koszczan, Joanna Podolska, Tomasz Wiśniewski and Natalia Bartczak? The name of this year’s POLIN Award laureate will be announced by Mr Tomek Ulatowski, POLIN Museum Distinguished Benefactor, and sponsor of the financial prizes in 2020 POLIN Award competition. Good evening! My name is Tomasz Ulatowski.

I have been supporting various projects run by POLIN Museum for several years now. Today we are meeting in difficult circumstances, with the pandemic raging across Poland and the entire globe. The logistics at times like that can be really tricky and complicated. And yet, against all odds, our candidates for 2020 POLIN Award have never ceased in their efforts to preserve the memory of what had once taken place in this land, where the Jewish community practically vanished, along with the memory of it. Today we are here to grant the Award — as we did in the previous years. POLIN Award for 2020 goes to Paweł Kulig! In recognition of his outstanding work towards the preservation of the Jewish cultural and historic heritage in the City of Łódź — taking upon himself the task of looking after the 40-hectare area of the New Jewish Cemetery in Łódź, and building a circle of allies and associates with whom he fights for the memory and dignity of this unique site — 2020 POLIN Award goes to Paweł Kulig! Sincere congratulations! Paweł will receive the financial prize of 20,000 PLN.

We wish to extend our heartfelt congratulations to all the nominees — Agnieszka Mysakowska, Karol Głębocki and Mirosław Reczko. Each of you will receive a financial prize of 5,000 PLN.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have just met the laureate of 2020 POLIN Award, the laureates of honourable mentions, and the nominees. Thank you all for participating in the POLIN Award gala. Once again, we wish to extend our warm congratulations to all the laureates and nominees. We would also like to express our gratitude to the Jankilevitsch Foundation, patron of the POLIN Award competition, and the Association of the Jewish Historical Institute, its co-organizer. We wish to thank all the sponsors of the financial prizes — Tomek Ulatowski, POLIN Museum Distingushed Benefactor, Ewa Masny-Askanas and Wiktor Askanas, Odette and Nimrod S. Ariav Foundation and an anonymous donor.

2020 POLIN Award competition has been realized within the Jewish Cultural Heritage project financed by Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway Liechtenstein and Norway as part of the EEA Fund and by the state budget.

See you all in 2021!