

Good evening, I am here to support the motion to make Smolensk Air Disaster and Katyn Massacre a commemoration day on April 10th this year and each year thereafter in all TCDSB schools.

The Katyn Massacre has been an event that is tragic on many levels: it is a war crime, an inhumane campaign of the ideology to reshape others and a tragedy for thousands of families. Following the Soviet invasion of Poland in September of 1939, the Soviet secret police has decided to purge the newly acquired territories of people that could lead any form of resistance. They have rounded up about 22 thousand of members of intelligentsia: police officers, lawyers, priests, and officers who were taken as prisoners of war. In May 1940, those people executed on the scale that could be called industrial. It was a plan. A plan that costed lives. The bodies were dumped in mass graves in Katyn Forest, left to never be discovered. When the truth came to light in 1943 Soviets denied Polish request to have independent committee from Red Cross to investigate the bodies. When turning to its allies, US and UK, Polish Government in exile received no backing as they valued the alliance with the Soviets more. In post war times, the massacre stayed unrecognized, illegal thing to talk about in communist Poland.

This tragedy stays as a scar on Polish community. It is loss of so many lives of young people and over 45 years of denying the knowledge about the fate of those people to their families. It continues, without recognition of how much of an atrocity it was. To add to that, another tragedy has stricken in 2010 with the Smolensk Air Disaster. A tragic loss of lives of highest officials in the country from all political backgrounds, including: the President of the Republic of Poland: Lech Kaczyński, First Lady – Maria Kaczyńska, Last President in Exile – Ryszard Kaczorowski, Marshal of the National Assembly, and heads of armed forces.

Katyn massacre is an atrocity that has been committed in following ideological orders, forgetting that the people on the other side are also human beings. It is important for people to learn about it as we live in the world, which is increasingly remote and impersonal, in the times where narration of "us" versus "them" is on the rise and it is easy to lose sight of people different from us as individuals. That dehumanization is the first step towards every tragedy, as it allows people to rationalize things that would otherwise be unthinkable.

Tragedies like Katyn have implications that carries over for generations. Losing a parent, not being able to learn your own history, it all leaves an impact. It is a wound that is mangled and scarred. Teaching young people about those

catastrophes, brings us closer towards the world where we don't repeat the mistakes of our past. But for that, the healing needs to happen. Commemorating those tragedies would be a step in the right direction and great service to all people of Polish ancestry.

Thank you