

Chicago 10/4/09

REMARKS MADE BY DR. THADDEUS V. GROMADA, PRESIDENT OF PIASA, ACCEPTING THE 2009 POLISH HERITAGE AWARD PRESENTED BY THE POLISH AMERICAN CONGRESS, ILLINOIS DIVISION AT THE 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL POLISH HERITAGE AWARD GALA ON OCTOBER 4, 2009, MARRIOTT O'HARE HOTEL , CHICAGO

Mr. Chairman, ladies and Gentlemen, Szanowni Panstwo, Drodzy Rodacy. I would be less than frank if I did not admit, that I feel very privileged and delighted to be here with you on this auspicious occasion, in the major center of Polonia, which is Chicago. The decision made by the Polish American Congress /Illinois Division with hq. in Chicago to honor an academic , cultural organization based in New York City is a very significant and even symbolic event, that we at the Polish Institute appreciate very much. It augurs well for the future because it will encourage the trend toward a stronger and more cooperative Chicago-New York connection in Polonia. You may be interested in knowing that when the Polish Institute was founded in 1942 in NYC, the first thing that the Prof. Oskar Halecki did, was to invite Mieczyslaw Haiman, Director and curator of the Polish Museum in Chicago, for membership and active participation. It also must be recalled that when the Polish Institute lost its financial support from the London Polish government-in-exile in 1945, it was the Polish American Congress that provided the Polish Institute with financial aid for almost five years which helped us survive in a difficult period.

It is profoundly important and most encouraging for us to receive the 2009 Polish Heritage Award from the PAC , because it is a tangible sign that you understand and appreciate the role that PIASA has played for 67 years since 1942 . As our distinguished member and Council member Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski has put it “ The Polish Institute was for many years an island of Poland’s independent intellectual thought during the destructive storms and enduring bad weather. It continued its special mission throughout the half century long communist suppression of independent thought. Today, the Institute is a vital link between the Polish American community as well as America and the newly independent Poland”. It maintains a strong center and learning in the capital city of the world. Its five story townhouse in the Murray Hill section of Manhattan houses a specialized reference library, rich archival collection, administrative and editorial offices of “The Polish Review” and PIASA BOOKS, a gallery and a small lecture hall.

Although the Polish Institute is an academic and scholarly organization, it does not operate in an “ivory tower” but lives in the real world and wants

contacts with real people. It is our conscious policy to cooperate with Polonia groups and organizations who are interested in supporting and cultivating Polish culture and learning in our American society. That's why our annual meetings and programs are open to the general public and not just to our members. When important issues and problems of the day arise, it does not hesitate to speak out in a responsible, thoughtful way. WE are just as interested as you are in helping to create a strong Polonian community with an influential position in mainstream America. Polonia needs Americans of Polish descent in positions of power and prestige not only in politics and government, but in academia, corporate world, science, media and the arts that would have impact on American culture. Brain power is what really counts. We need more Polish American giants like the Nobel Prize winner in Physics, Frank T. Wilczek of MIT, who is a PIASA member and fellow. With your moral and material help which is needed, our Institute can be more effective by providing the cultural and intellectual nourishment to help young Polish Americans become more conscious, more aware, more committed and more proud of their Polish heritage.

The bottom line is that we must find a way to develop a creative cooperative partnership among our Polonia organizations and communities which are far from being united and homogeneous; a partnership that will be based on mutual respect and tolerance, a partnership that understands the principles of coordination and division of labor; a partnership that emphasizes effective positive activities rather than acting in a defensive posture. Such a partnership will go a long way in helping Polonia secure an influential position and presence in mainstream America which would be in our best interests and in the best interests of Poland, the land of our ancestors.

So, Ladies and Gentlemen, as an American of Polish, goral, descent who has devoted a great deal of his time and energy to the Polish Institute since the 1960's as its member, who in 1971 became its Secretary General, in 1991 its Executive Director and in 2008 its President, it is my great honor and pleasure to accept with thanks and gratitude your Polish Heritage Award in the name of PIASA Board, Council and nearly 1500 members scattered throughout this country. I am sure that the great Polish historian Oskar Halecki, one of the founders and first Executive director of the Polish Institute, my mentor at Fordham University who inspired me, would have been most pleased with today's momentous event. Thank you. Serdeczne dzięki.

Dr. Thaddeus V. Gromada, President and Executive Director PIASA