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## **Remembrance Day: Auschwitz-Birkenau, programme of official celebrations. Card. Grocholewski representing the Holy See**

The official celebrations for the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation, by the Red Army, of the Auschwitz Birkenau Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp will begin today at 15.30. Participating in the celebrations will be a small group of survivors and representatives from the European Union and many countries around the world. Representing the Holy See will be Polish Cardinal Zenon Grocholewski, who personally recalls the terror of the Nazi occupation of Poland. The commemoration of over a million deaths in the camp, most of which Jews, will end with ecumenical prayers and a ceremony in memory of the victims at the International Monument in Birkenau. The camp, as recalled in the CCEE–COMECE Joint Statement, “is the largest site of mass genocide in the world” due to “the enormity of the Jewish victims”. Established in 1940 on occupied Polish territories annexed to the Third Reich, it was initially intended for Polish prisoners and was later expanded to include the nearby village of Birkenau (Brzezinka in Polish). In the years between 1942 and 1945, as part of “the final solution of the Jewish question” (Endlösung), it became a place of mass extermination of the Jewish people. The ceremony in memory of the prisoners was preceded by meetings between the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, and Israeli President Reuven Rivlin, the Director General of UNESCO Audrey Azoulay, and Ukraine President Zelensky.

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