

Diplomatic crisis erupts between Poland and Israel after WCK killings in Gaza

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Israel's ambassador has sparked outrage for accusing Poles of anti-Semitism following the killing of seven aid workers.

Warsaw, April 5 (RHC)-- A diplomatic crisis has erupted between Poland and Israel following the death of a Polish aid worker in Gaza, with the Polish president denouncing a comment by the Israeli ambassador as “outrageous” and the foreign ministry in Warsaw saying it was summoning him for a meeting.

A Polish man, 35-year-old Damian Sobol, was among seven people who were killed while delivering food to besieged Palestinians in Gaza with the charity World Central Kitchen this week.

Israel has called the incident a “mistake” that followed a misidentification, despite the vehicles being clearly marked and the organisation having coordinated with the Israeli military prior to departure.

Amid shock and outrage in Poland over the incident, Israel’s ambassador to Poland, Yacov Livne, pushed back on Tuesday at what he said were attempts by the “extreme right and left in Poland” to accuse Israel of “intentional murder in the attack.”

He said on social media Tuesday that “anti-Semites will always remain anti-Semites, and Israel will remain a democratic Jewish state that fights for its right to exist. Also for the good of the entire Western world.”

Polish President Andrzej Duda on Thursday called the comment “outrageous” and described the ambassador as “the biggest problem for the state of Israel in relations with Poland.” Duda said authorities in Israel have spoken about the tragedy “in a very subdued way” but that “unfortunately, their ambassador to Poland is not able to maintain such delicacy and sensitivity, which is unacceptable.”

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk, though a political opponent of Duda, voiced a similar position and said that the ambassador should apologise for issuing a comment offensive to Poles. He said that Israel should pay compensation to Sobol’s family.

“We will expect... an immediate explanation of the circumstances and compensation for the victims’ relatives,” Prime Minister Donald Tusk told a news conference.

On Wednesday, Tusk also published a comment on social media addressing Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Livne, saying “The vast majority of Poles showed full solidarity with Israel after the attack launched by Hamas on October 7th. Today, you are putting this solidarity to a really hard test. The tragic attack on volunteers and your reaction arouse understandable anger.”

The Polish foreign ministry has summoned the Israeli ambassador for Friday morning, local media reported.

Polish and Israeli relations have recently been on the mend after several difficult years. Ties were badly damaged due to disputes over how to remember Polish behaviour during the Holocaust, when Nazi Germany occupied Poland and carried out the mass murder of Jews.

Israel did not have an ambassador in Poland for months under the previous government due to a row over Holocaust education trips for Israeli students to Poland. The post was reinstated last year.

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