

Dr Monika Kończyk, Consul General of the Republic of Poland,

Mrs Gosia Hill, Honorary Consul of the Republic of Poland in South Australia,

Mrs Małgorzata Kwiatkowska, President of the Polish Community Council of Australia (PCCA),

PCCA Delegates, members of Polish community,

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

It is with immense pleasure that I accepted the invitation to join you in Adelaide to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Polish Community Council of Australia.

On this joy-filled occasion, I wish to take this opportunity to express my words of congratulations, appreciation and gratitude to the PCCA for its commendable services to the Polish community in Australia. I also wish to thank you for excellent relationship and collaboration with the Polish diplomatic and consular representations in Australia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted that we are starting the celebrations with this gala concert featuring young musicians from Brighton Secondary School together with a renowned artist who has been awarded an Order of Australia Medal (OAM) for his contribution to music. Mr David Helfgott, depicted in brilliant performance by Geoffrey Rush, was the inspiration for the 1996 Oscar-winning film "Shine".

David is not only an exceptional pianist. Born in 1947 in Melbourne to Polish Jewish parents, who left war-torn Europe to build a new life in a distant land, he has not forgotten about his Polish heritage, with Fryderyk Chopin still being one of his favourite composers to perform. Thus, I am very glad that he was chosen by the organizers as the star of tonight's artistic performance. He is an outstanding individual of Polish heritage and a perfect illustration of Polish traces

in Australia which are numerous, even if not always instantly recognized or well-known of.

Let me give you some examples:

- Most of you probably heard about Polish traveller, cartographer and scientist Sir Paul Edmund Strzelecki, who explored and described vast patches of south-eastern part of the mainland and Tasmania as well as climbed the highest Australian mountain naming it Mount Kościuszko after a Polish and American national hero Tadeusz Kościuszko. There are many “Kosciuszko” and “Strzelecki's” geographical names on the map of Australia, among them South Australia’s Strzelecki Track and Victoria’s Strzelecki Ranges.
- But how many of you have heard that during the Siege of Tobruk in 1941 the 9th Australian Division fought against German troops alongside British soldiers and the Polish Carpathian Brigade? This year marks the 80th anniversary of the events that gave rise to the legend of the mighty “Rats of Tobruk”.
- Did you know that Polish workers, including former WW II servicemen, built the hydro-electric power schemes in Tasmania and the Snowy Mountains?
- Or that the Sydney Olympic Stadium was designed and built by Polish engineer and architect Edmund Obiata?
- Did you know that Polish sculptor Wojciech Pietranik designed the medals for the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000?

There are many, many more instances of valuable Polish contribution to the Australian multicultural landscape. It is estimated that over 200,000 Australians have Polish ancestry. And I am very proud of today’s dynamic Polish community, being an important asset in our bilateral relations with Australia. Strong Polish diaspora, known as ‘Polonia’, has a key role in fostering our mutual

understanding and enhancing people-to-people ties. Poles in Australia are committed to maintaining Polish tradition, culture and language. Mindful of their origins, they remain loyal to Australia as citizens of this country. Bi-cultural identity is an asset and a strength to be treasured. It allows them to make “exceptional contributions” to “building Australia’s prosperity and national well-being”, as acknowledged by Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Poland and Australia. But the last five decades of official contacts pale in comparison to the long history of Polish settlement Down Under, which dates back to the 19th century. Let me remind you that it was here in Southern Australia, in a place called the Polish Hill River, where the first Polish priest, Father Leon Rogalski arrived 150 years ago and the Polish settlement was established.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Preserving the history of Polish migration to Australia, promoting Polish culture, tradition and language would not have been possible without dedication of Polish community members, especially those engaged in various Polish community organizations. As an umbrella organization comprising over 20 member organizations based in all Australian states and the ACT, the Polish Community Council in Australia has been instrumental in this regard.

Integrating different individuals, groups, organizations, views, opinions and visions has never been easy despite that the challenges over time have been many, with the global pandemic the most recent one. Yet, the Council has made overall tremendous contribution to bringing together the Polish community, encouraging and facilitating collaboration and supporting Polish community

initiatives throughout Australia, promoting a positive image of Poland, supporting Polish language education, preserving and protecting various elements of Polish cultural and material heritage in Australia, etc.

The PCCA has also been a reliable and valued partner of the Polish Embassy in Canberra, the Consulate General in Sydney as well as close ally of our Honorary Consuls around Australia. The activities of the Council have been complementary and reinforcing to our initiatives and projects. In actual fact the Council's capabilities and convening power have often been much stronger than the diplomatic and consular missions' personal and financial resources.

Ladies and gentlemen,

70 years of continuous activity is quite a long period and a historic milestone for a community-based organization. It should certainly give the Council a great feeling of achievement and satisfaction.

Already in the first decades of the existence of the Council, in the aftermath of the WWII, it played an active role in voicing opinions of the Polish community in Australia, providing assistance to Poles in need, supporting the "Solidarity" movement and Polish struggle for democracy. In 1981, thanks to the Council's efforts, the Help Poland Live Appeal collected \$2.3 million, including \$1 million donated by Australia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased that after the transition to democracy in 1989 up to this day, the PCCA has remained faithful to its mission, actively supporting 'Polonia' in Australia on various levels. All those involved in building this organization into what it has become today deserve to be recognized for their tireless work, distinguished service and outstanding leadership.

I very much appreciate the effort that the Polish Community Council of Australia makes to keep the Polish spirit in Australia alive. You have my admiration and gratitude. Best wishes for your future endeavours and I hope to continue our friendship and partnership in the years ahead.

Thank you for your attention and I wish you an entertaining musical evening.