November 23, 1938

American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
100 East 42nd street
New York City

Dear Sirs,

I am enclosing herewith four copies of a report by Mr. Troper on the situation at Zbanszyn. Mr. Troper has asked me to add that this is just a bird's eye-view of his observations, and that in the near future he will send a more complete report.

Sincerely yours,

Nathan Katz.
We found the township of Zbanszyn, located on the Polish-German frontier with a population of approximately 4,000, among whom there are about six Jewish families, converted into a center where 5,000 Polish Jews deported from Germany, have been marooned for the last two weeks without being permitted to go to the interior. Originally, 8,500 people from German territory crossed that border. The first groups, however, were easily admitted into the interior; but after the first day and a half, orders were issued that all exiles were to be detained at Zbanszyn.

Dragged from their homes mostly during the night, most of the victims reached Zbanszyn without any provisions or clothing, and it became necessary to organize immediate assistance for them on the spot. Under the supervision of the J.D.C. staff sent out from Warsaw office of the J.D.C., an emergency relief program was instituted.

Upon our arrival in Zbanszyn, we found 19 telephone lines operating from the temporary J.D.C. headquarters in Zbanszyn, linked up with branches and different departments, which were organized and managed partly by the most intelligent elements of the deportees, and partly by the staff members. We were also informed that sixty women of the leading Jewish families in the larger neighboring cities of Poland, volunteered their services and worked side by side with the J.D.C. workers. In addition, several doctors and nurses from the nearby communities came to the fore and through their assistance and efforts medical assistance was extended to the sick. They improvised a hospital for those patients who required steady care, and make-shift ambulatoria were set up for visiting patients.

The mass of 5,500 refugees presented a very colorful selection of profession as well as age range. There were children only one year old, and there were people over seventy. There were merchants who were compelled to leave their stores behind.
them as well as lawyers and artisans. There were tailors, shoemakers, barbers, all of them penniless, without any change of clothing or underwear.

A number of the exiles were separated from their families, who were left behind in Germany. There were husbands whose wives remained on the other side of the frontier; children parted from their parents, and women who were driven away from their husbands.

**Organising First-Aid for the Victims:**

With the arrival of the J.D.C. staff and volunteers, effective activities were immediately started to organize this mass of refugees into special groups and to register them according to their cities of birth principally to put them in touch with landsleute or with relatives whom they may have in their native cities. The organizational work was carried out in a most orderly fashion, with the active cooperation of the refugees themselves. In fact, over 500 of these refugees have enlisted in voluntary service in the various departments which have been set up as follows:

1. **Juridical Department** - which gives legal advice to the refugees with respect to official documents required for Poland, or for sending to the members of the families who have remained in Germany information as to how to dispose of properties, etc.

2. **Emigration Department** - which gives advice on emigration matters to some 350 prospective emigrants to various countries, of whom 250 have applied to the American Consulate in Germany for visas to the United States, submitting the necessary affidavits prior to their deportation from the Reich. This department is assisted by a special representative from the HIAS.

3. **Post Office Department** - Almost every deportee having left some member of his family in Germany, was eager to send a message - either by mail or by telegram - to their homes in Germany to advise their relatives of their whereabouts. The correspondence especially during the first days required large handling
which the small local office could not accommodate, and when the refugees undertook to handle their own volume of correspondence, the post office authorities welcomes their assistance.

4. Feeding - Department - the necessity of feeding 5,500 persons required many-sided activities, such as acquisition of foodstuffs, cooking, the distribution of the food, securing of dishes and utensils, etc. Partly with the help of the ladies who arrived from the different Jewish communities, and partly through the disciplined assistance of the refugees, this department was organised in a very quick order and functioned most satisfactorily. We heard no complaints from any of the refugees regarding the food or the rations, the latter having been worked out by a medical committee. The Polish Red Cross came to the assistance of this particular department by supplying military kitchens.

5. Transportation Department - a number of wealthy Jews throughout Poland having their own cars and trucks, placed these conveyances at the disposal of the relief committee. These were used for the delivery of foodstuffs and other supplied, as well as for the transportation of the workers and sick. This department, headed by one of the refugees, was functioning in a most exemplary manner and facilitated the connections between the various departments.

6. Hospitals - a temporary hospital was improvised where about fifty people were hospitalised, over and under the many who were treated in the ambulatoria. The equipment of this hospital, consisting of instruments and medicaments, were donated by Jewish doctors and hospitals from various parts of Poland. It is of interest to point out that being faced with a situation where an operation had to be performed and having no operating table, one was improvised by the doctors by using the flat top of a Singer sewing machine covered with linen, cheese cloth and paper. The operation was successful, and the child is coming along very nicely. To insure cleanliness among the patients, bathing facilities
were improvised. Beds were not available for all of the fifty patients and it was
therefore found necessary to place some of them on straw on the floors. The doctors
of the hospitals - all of them volunteers - come from various sections of the country and
rotate. A chief of staff has been appointed, and he carefully supervises everything
that is done. Too much cannot be said about the spirit of the doctors and nurses and
the volunteers. They themselves sleep on the floor of a very small room in order not
to take beds away from the patients. The hospital has a special dietary kitchen run
by women refugee cooks.

7. Children's Home - special attention has been given to care of the children. While the
adult population lives in barracks and stables, the children, especially the younger
ones, were placed in private homes under special supervision and nursing in a special
children's home set up for this purpose.

8. Cultural and Religious Department - realizing that most of the refugees do not know
the Polish language - many of them having been born in Germany or having left for
Germany at a very early age - special courses have been instituted for the teaching
of Polish. These courses are given by some of the refugees who formerly were instruct­
ors in German- high schools and universities. A synagogue was also improvised for
the religious elements, and 1000 pair of phillacteries and many talasim have been
contributed from all parts of Poland in order to accommodate the religious Jews.

Classes for children were also established, and games and gymnastics engaged in.

Living quarters:

The bulk of the refugees have been "housed" in condemned military stables, some of
them sleeping on bundles of straw, and others on the floor with no linen. Most of them
have been supplied with blankets which were sent in by Jewish relief committees throughout
the country. These committees have also sent out clothing, shoes, soap, underwear, etc.,
to be distributed among the refugees. One stable still had the stalls, and these surpri­
singly gave some degree of privacy-a stall being assigned to a family group. In one
barn, everything had been removed except the frame, and 230 people – men, women and some of the older children – were lodged in it, most of them sleeping constantly in their clothes on a dirty floor. The haylofts of these stables were also utilized as living quarters. In one of the barns the roof leaked to such an extent that regrettably it had to be abandoned. In all of these places there still remained the strong stench of the animals at one time kept there.

In addition to the military barns, a number of refugees were placed in all available private homes. For the latter the relief committee paid rent, although many of the local people refused to accept money. The village dance hall too was converted into sleeping quarters as well as the village restaurant but these places cannot be used until very late at night.

Spirit of the People:

It must be emphasized that despite the gloomy surroundings and hardships the spirit among the refugees was as good as could be expected under the circumstances. As a matter of fact, many of them expressed their good fortune to be out of Germany and indicated a desire to bring their families over in the expectation that they would eventually be allowed to leave Zbarszyn for the interior. Some of them felt convinced that as soon as they are admitted into the interior, they would be able to establish themselves and become self-supporting. Some of them had received letters from their relatives indicating that all of their worldly goods in Germany had been looted and that the remaining members of the family had nothing to look forward to except eventual emigration.

A number of refugees stated that unless they were permitted to move to the interior very quickly, they would become demoralised, especially by reason of lack of occupation. They also feared that the approaching rain season and cold weather would make it impossible for them to remain in the place, as there were absolutely no heating facilities of any kind.
Treatment by local non-Jewish Population:

The local non-Jewish population displayed a sympathetic attitude towards the refugees from the very first hour of their arrival in Zbanszyn. Many non-Jews have taken in some of the refugees free of charge. The refugees were not confined to their barracks, and were permitted to go about the city freely, although, of course they were not permitted to leave the town. As a matter of fact, the streets of this small village presented a picture which made the entire township look like a flourishing Jewish Community. It must be added that these refugees have conducted themselves most commendably and that no untoward incidents whatsoever have occurred among them. These refugees came from the larger cities of Germany, as for instance, Berlin, Hamburg, Hannover, Koeln, Duesseldorf, Essen, etc.

It may be of interest to note that among the refugees was practically the whole staff of the Hochschule fuer Juedische Wissenschaft, located in Berlin and known throughout the Jewish world.

Maintenance:

It was estimated that the upkeep of the 5,500 refugees in Zbanszyn amounts to about Zloty 1-1/2, or 30 cents per capita per day, or a total of Zloty 8,000, equivalent to something between dollars 1,600 and 2,000 a day. Although the J.D.C. practically organized and supervised the entire operation, its actual contribution amounted to about $30,000 or Zloty 160,000, - the bulk of the money having been raised by the local Jewish committees and by subscription lists opened by practically every Jewish newspaper in the country. This was exclusive of the contributions of food, clothing and equipment. The Jews of Poland displayed a unique spirit of helpfulness and in fact, contributions will still continue to come to the local committees. These contributions are centralized in one fund managed by a central relief committee established in Warsaw, which consists of the most prominent Jewish leaders of Poland and works in close cooperation with the J.D.C.

The major problem will naturally come when these people will be permitted to move
Into the interior of Poland.

In addition to the 5,500 refugees detained in Zbanszyn, there are about 1,200 deportees in Poznan. There are also 32 people in no-man's-land - between the Polish and German frontiers, not permitted to enter Poland because their documents are not in order. These refugees are being provided with food, clothing and shelter from the Polish side by the committee operating in Zbanszyn. The refugees in Poznan are not allowed for the time being to leave the city and are being taken care of by the local people in Poznan consisting of 250 Jewish families. This small number of Jewish families have raised among themselves Zloty 14,000, in addition to the contributions made by them of food, clothing and equipment. They are in close contact with the Central relief committee in Warsaw. Many of the refugees are living with private families while a good number of them live in abandoned railroad cars.