

7 September 2010

Statement of the Jewish Community of Lithuania

[authorized English translation]

Regarding Judgment of the Lithuanian Provisional Government of 1941 and the LAF

Recently an increasing number of articles have appeared in the Lithuanian mass media which attempt to assess the activity of the Lithuanian Provisional Government regarding Jewish Lithuanian citizens from June 23 to August 5, 1941.

The Lithuanian Jewish Community believes that a sincere aspiration to restore Lithuanian independence stimulated the appearance of the Provisional Government.

Unfortunately, based on different documents from that time and the research of Lithuanian and foreign historians, we must state that, influenced by the openly anti-Semitic activity of the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF), the Provisional Government adopted a great number of anti-Jewish laws, and thus, undoubtedly, it contributed to anti-Jewish sentiments escalated by the LAF and later the Nazi occupiers, sentiments which quickly grew into the mass murder of Lithuanian Jews even before the German military entered Kaunas and other Lithuanian cities. Abundant historical facts attest to this. In some parts of the press completely positive assessments of the activities of the Self-Defense and TDA battalions appear. The Lithuanian Jewish Community considers this a complete misunderstanding as well as an insult to the memory of the Jewish Lithuanian citizens who died.

Most media pundits writing on this topic intentionally or unintentionally avoid talking about the connection between the Provisional Government and the LAF, while historical sources clearly witness that the LAF was the main force behind the appearance, formation and ideology of the Provisional Government, which was anti-Semitic and incited violence against the Jewish population.

The policy of the Provisional Government, which in many cases was dictated by the LAF, demonstrated unambiguously to the people of Lithuania that the Jews of Lithuania were not equal citizens with Lithuanians. In this manner the murderous element was not stopped, but in a bizarre way actually encouraged. The position of the Provisional Government placed the Jews of Lithuania outside the law.

There was not a single Provisional Government statement or other document protesting against the mass persecution of the Jews of Lithuania, nor was there a Provisional Government document in which the Provisional Government stated the Government's intention to defend all citizens of Lithuania without exception, or the intention to refrain from the persecution of citizens of certain backgrounds. On July 12, 1941, German envoy Dr. Kleist, arriving from Berlin in place of Dr. Greffe, told the chairman of the Provisional Government in a kind of ultimatum that there could not even be any discussion of Germany recognizing the Provisional Government. Despite the fact that the Provisional Government understood that the Nazis would not allow them to attain their stated goal of independence, discriminatory, anti-Jewish regulations, including the shameful "Regulations on the Situation of Jews" (formulated on August 1 1941, four days before the closure of activities by the Provisional Government) were constantly adopted by the Provisional Government.

The Lithuanian Jewish Community believes that in the context of the abundance of anti-Jewish regulations adopted by the Provisional Government, the inability to distance itself from the anti-Semitic announcements of the LAF and the mass murder of Lithuanian Jews that had already begun on the ground, the activity of the Provisional Government of Lithuania needs to be assessed negatively, because of the rapid transition from the idea of restoring Lithuanian independence to collaboration with the Nazi occupiers, which expressed itself most in the area of the Lithuanian Provisional Government's discriminatory policies towards the Jews of Lithuania. For that reason the Lithuanian Jewish Community cannot, sadly, find anything positive in the activity of the Lithuanian Provisional Government.

Attempts to positively assess the Provisional Government of Lithuania which called itself the Government of Lithuania and which was unable to even issue one statement defending its Jewish citizens, and to now bestow upon it total or partial legitimacy, is moreover in opposition to the bona fide interests of Lithuania, and gravely damages the country's image in the international arena.

The Lithuanian Jewish Community notes that there were individual members of the Provisional Government who later, after the Provisional Government had ceased to exist, rescued Lithuanian Jews at risk to their own lives, for example, the architect Vytautas Landsbergis-Zemkalis and his family. The heroic deeds of individuals and the activity of the Government as the sovereign of the Nation, however, are different things, calling for different responsibilities for, in one case, a personal act, or in the other, a decision made in the name of the Nation.

Out of respect to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust, out of respect for those several members of the Provisional Government of Lithuania whose families later rescued Jews, out of respect for history, we call on politicians and journalists, to abstain from automatic positive assessments of the activity of the Provisional Government of Lithuania, because the activity of the Provisional Government and the atrocities of the LAF white armbanders coincide with, and in the historical narrative are part and parcel of the beginning of the mass extermination of the Jews of Lithuania.

The mass murder of the Jews of Lithuania is a dark stain on the history of Lithuania. The Provisional Government, unfortunately, is part of that stain. Let us not create a pretext for generations of the future to accuse us of airbrushing those blemishes away.

June 22 next year, 2011, will mark the 70th anniversary of the June uprising. Its noble aspiration of restoring independence was that very same day irretrievably drowned in the innocent blood of Lithuanian Jews by the LAF executioners. Next year will mark as well the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the mass murder of Jews, a genocide unprecedented in Lithuanian history, wiping out 600 years of Lithuanians and Jews living together. What is there to celebrate?

We have more of a basis for concentrating together on prayer for the dead.

We are naming June 22 as a day of reflection and prayer: prayers for independence for all Lithuanian citizens, Lithuanians and Jews, Russians and Poles, Tatars and Karaites, Germans, Roma, Belarusians and all others.

Let us honor the victims of the mass murders and their memory, and bow our heads to those Lithuanians who, risking their lives, rescued their fellow Jewish citizens. Let us not try to look for heroes where there

were none. Future generations will not understand us, nor will the international community, which long ago found an appropriate moral and political assessment for their own quislings and traitors. Let us be free, let us not fear the truth. And let there be a stop to the efforts to indoctrinate Lithuanian citizens between the lines with the idea that the brown occupier meant a lesser evil to Lithuania at that time than the red one. That will not succeed, because no pseudo-historians or journalists will raise 200,000 murdered Lithuanian Jews back to life from the dead.

Let us learn to live and work for the welfare of Lithuania with this history as it is. However bitter it is.

The Jewish Community of Lithuania
8 September 2010