

*Remarks of HE Darius Degutis, ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania, at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, on 20 September 2010:*

Mr Chairman of Yad Vashem Avner Shalev,  
Mr Nathan Eitam, Director General of Yad Vashem,  
Mr Chairman of the Association of Vilna Jews Michael Schemiawitz,  
Mr Chairman of the Association of Lithuanian Jews Joseph Melamed,  
Mr Uri Chanoch, Chairman of the Holocaust Survivors Association,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear Friends,

Allow me to start by thanking Yad Vashem and the Association of Vilna Jews for their kind cooperation and support in organizing this event that is very important for all of us.

Dear friends, please permit me to speak not as an Ambassador but as someone from Lithuania who already lives in Israel for one year.

First of all I should note that for me and my wife this was a year in which we have enjoyed every moment of living in Israel, in your wonderful country, a country which has so many things to tell and to offer.

During the last year we have been visited by more than a hundred visitors from Lithuania. Some private, some official. And every one of them has left Israel with the most positive impressions. The history of Israel, its culture, fantastic nature, many various excellent attractions for tourism leave an unforgettable impression. The achievements of Israel accomplished in a rather short period of time — just 62 years — provides us with a very good example to follow. From you we could learn how to love your homeland, how to defend it with passion, how to be a true patriot, how to create a successful and vibrant economy based on magnificent achievements in science and modern technologies.

These achievements of Israel, I am deeply convinced, create great opportunities for our mutual cooperation in various fields.

But today, ladies and gentlemen, we have gathered to remember and to commemorate. Today we extend our most sincere respect to the memory of thousands of our brothers and sisters, Jews of Lithuania who perished in the Shoah. Today we commemorate the National Memorial Day for the Genocide of the Lithuanian Jews and liquidation of the Vilna Ghetto. Today we are remembering and grieving on a very painful and tragic page of the history that brought enormous suffering for the Jewish people. The tragedy of the catastrophe unfortunately was extremely hurtful for the Lithuanian Jewish community. It is inconceivable that the Lithuanian Jewish community that prospered throughout 600 years was almost totally destroyed. It breaks

my heart and casts a shadow of shame that among the perpetrators of these crimes were also my countrymen. This cannot and will not be neither forgotten nor forgiven.

I very well understand that until today for many Jews, Holocaust survivors, and their family members, it is painful even to think about Lithuania, for many it is not easy to visit Lithuania, to search and to find their identities, to build new bridges connecting our nations and states.

But nevertheless, while paying a most sincere respect to your pain and suffering, I dare to believe that in our future we can create many positive moments that are mutually beneficial and much needed for all of us.

I know — to remain silent, often, is easier than to speak.

But I am confident that our common history leads to a huge potential of opportunities that could further unite our two countries. Economy, tourism, science, culture, education, sports, youth exchange are among our top priorities. I am pleased that during the last year we had as never before a very extensive exchange of official visits of ministers, members of Parliament, and business delegations. We highly respect the fact that Israeli Foreign Minister made a first official visit to Lithuania in July. We are also happy that the project of the March of Living successfully continues (allow me to extend most sincere appreciation for the great work done by Mrs. Mickey Kantor), that Lithuania was also visited by Witnesses in Uniform.

There are many other interesting ideas on future projects. But while developing and implementing them I think we should do our best in engaging young generation.

That is exactly the reason why our children – Ruta and Julius – have come all the way from Lithuania and England to join us here on this occasion. They must be knowledgeable and aware about the past, so that they might also know how to carry on and build the future.

I hope and I wish that your children and grandchildren could join us here next year, that they also come and visit and rediscover Lita, the land of their grandparents.

Using this opportunity I would like to extend kind appreciation for the efforts of Mr. Avner Shalev and the staff of Yad Vashem for continuously providing support for the Holocaust education programs in Lithuania. We are grateful to Mr. Michael Shemiavitz and his team at the Vilna Jews Association for their tireless work done in treasuring the important memory of our common past, for organizing many significant events that also help us to build the future.

I would also like to thank Mr. Joseph Melamed for his very interesting initiative to develop cooperation between Ben Gurion University and Lithuanian academia.

Dear All,

It becomes a tradition for me on this occasion of our gathering here at Yad Vashem to recite a poem by a Hebrew author. Today I would like to do the same again. During this year's March of the Living a commemorative plaque in honor of the prominent Hebrew poet Lea Goldberg was opened in Kaunas. Allow me in respect of her memory to read a wonderful poem about her feelings for Lithuania.

## PINE

Here I will not hear the voice of the cuckoo.  
Here the tree will not wear a cape of snow.  
But it is here in the shade of these pines  
my whole childhood reawakens.

The chime of the needles: Once upon a time —  
I called the snow-space homeland,  
and the green ice at the river's edge —  
was the poem's grammar in a foreign place.

Perhaps only migrating birds know —  
suspended between earth and sky —  
the heartache of two homelands.

With you I was transplanted twice,  
with you, pine trees, I grew —  
roots in two disparate landscapes.