

Translation into English by Geoff Vasil of the speech delivered in Lithuanian by Faina Kukliansky, head of the Vilnius Jewish Community and vice president of the Jewish Community of Lithuania, at Ponar (Paneriai) on 21 September 2010:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We again gather to pay our respects to the victims of the genocide of Lithuanian Jews.

Most of them lie in the ground where they were born and grew up, the land which they loved and made renowned. Of them some seventy thousand lie right here, in Ponar (Paneriai), most of them brought from the Vilna Ghetto. It was liquidated sixty-seven years ago.

In the report of Karl Jaeger, chief of the German Security Police and SD in Lithuania, dated December 1st 1941, we read: "Today we can say that operational unit 3 has achieved its task: the Jewish problem has been solved in Lithuania. There are no Jews left in Lithuania except for Jews being used for labor and their families."

But the Nazi goal of liquidating all the Jews of Lithuania was not achieved. They didn't manage to kill everyone. Although just a very small part survived, a few Jews survived. The surviving Jews in Lithuania built a community which became a haven for all Jews living in the country.

The Lithuanian Jewish community is not a political party or an academic research institution, but on certain topics our opinion is unanimous and clear.

Before those who were murdered and those who escaped, we will never be ashamed to say that we:

- Forever thank the rescuers and condemn our murderers, and will seek to have them named publicly. It should be noted that thanks to Pinchas Fridberg, a member of our community, a foundation has been established and is operating to financially support Yad Vashem Righteous Gentiles. Neither the state of Lithuania nor Israel does this.
- We will never call former Ghetto residents and anti-fascist fighters "criminals" and we will always fight against attempts to deny the Holocaust, whether by the president of Iran or a local anti-Semite. We believe that public statements such as "Jews wield the stick of the Holocaust" are insulting and unacceptable.
- We will never agree with the "Double Genocide theory" and we will fight against the fiction that Jews did not suffer under the Stalinist regime. The concept of genocide must be understood as it is in the Geneva Convention and

in article 6 of the statute of the International Criminal Court: planned actions intended to implement the destruction of a certain ethnicity or group of people. We believe it is unethical, unjust and incorrect to equate the Holocaust and Stalinism. We hope that more space will be given to the theme of the Holocaust at the Museum of Genocide Victims.

- We will continue to strive for the rights of Ghetto inmates and deportees to not fall into separate categories by law.
- We are grateful to all who have contributed to Holocaust education in Lithuania and we will actively take part in these studies. Here I must mention the efforts of the US Embassy and the Washington Holocaust Museum. But I would like to speak about my experience here, in Lithuania. Yesterday evening I took part in the commemoration of the mass murder of the Jews of Nemencine. In Yiddish we call this visiting of gravesites *kéyver óves*. On September 20, the date the Jews of Nemencine were murdered, every year now for twenty years, that is, since Lithuanian independence, the Nemencine town administration and the Konstantinas Parcevskis primary school teachers and students, hold a history lesson next to the monument commemorating the murder victims in the Nemencine forest where they were murdered. And yesterday evening the children prepared a program, an alderman told the school pupils about the Jews of Nemencine, about every single little house where the murdered people lived, and the students even named the names of some of the children murdered. The sound of the violin played by the student who wasn't accustomed to playing in the forest and the solemn concentration of the children assembled affected me personally more than speeches and discussions by statesmen. The leaders of the Nemencine community and school have done all they could for their dead neighbors; they haven't forgotten them or their memory. "Wherever you may live, wherever you may be, remember the history of your town, tell everyone about our Jewish brothers and sisters who lived here." This is what Holocaust education is all about. There was no need for police, for security. People behaved naturally, recalling and speaking of the tragedy that took place. Perhaps there are more such rural districts and schools in Lithuania, but we don't always know about this, because the media aren't interested.

Not only do we pay our respect to those murdered, we have an obligation to them and ourselves to make sure this crime never happens again.