

ארגון יהודי עולמי להשבת רכוש (איל"ר)
WORLD JEWISH RESTITUTION ORGANIZATION

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By fax and email

Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius
Gedimino ave. 11
LT-01103 Vilnius
LITHUANIA

Dear Prime Minister Kubilius:

We are writing with great dismay regarding the lack of progress on the issue of Jewish communal property restitution in Lithuania and to express how offended the members and allies of the World Jewish Restitution Organization (WJRO) were at your recent action on this issue.

It has been seven years since your predecessors promised to enact new legislation for the return of or compensation for confiscated Jewish community and religious properties in Lithuania. Lithuania is the European country with the least progress on this issue, a fact noted last year in a US Congressional resolution which singled out your country for critique.

We have heard your past comments in support of concluding this issue and also noted your public statement, shortly after you assumed office, that you hoped this matter would be addressed soon. Therefore, we were particularly outraged to learn in the media last week that you have appointed as your advisor on Jewish property restitution someone who has been publicly hostile to this issue as well as insulting to WJRO and our local partner, the Lithuanian Jewish Community (LJC).

At the request of the Lithuanian government, WJRO and LJC jointly formed the "Foundation for the Preservation of the Lithuanian Jewish Heritage" in order to claim and receive restituted properties and to use these assets to benefit Lithuanian Jewry and heritage. On behalf of this Foundation we worked closely with the Ministry of Justice and Government to draft new legislation and we all reached agreement on language for this new law. In November 2007 this draft bill was formally submitted by the Ministry to the Government, yet no action has been taken on this for the past 16 months.

We see your announcement last week as an act of bad faith, in contradiction to your stated desire to finish the issue of Jewish property restitution.

The members of WJRO (listed below) represent the Jewish organizations in the United States, Europe and Israel who speak for world Jewry on restitution issues. The American Jewish Committee and the organization of Lithuanian Holocaust survivors are close partners of WJRO on working to achieve restitution in Lithuania. The LJC and its partner, the Lithuanian Jewish Religious Community, represent nearly all the Jews now living in Lithuania.

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Members: Agudath Israel World Organization; American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors; American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee; B'nai B'rith International; Centre of Organizations of Holocaust Survivors in Israel; Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany; EJCIEJC Joint European Delegation; Jewish Agency for Israel; World Jewish Congress; World Zionist Organization

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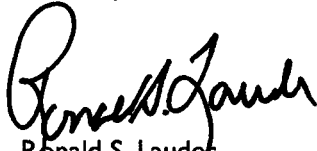
Together we ask you to submit the agreed-upon draft law to your Government and then to the Seimas. We believe that after seven years of deliberation on the text of this legislation, it is time for you to take action to begin to achieve some measure of justice for Lithuanian Jewry and Holocaust survivors.

The way this issue has been handled over the past seven years, together with recent increased anti-Semitic activity in the Lithuania, and the handling of other public Jewish issues, leads us to question how worthy your country is to have Vilnius designated as the European Cultural Capital for 2009. It seems to us that Jewish cultural heritage is not being respected in Lithuania today.

We also note that in June the Czech government, under its Presidency of the European Union, will host a major international "Holocaust Era Assets Conference" to which Lithuania and more than forty other nations have been invited. WJRO and Jewish organizations and communities will have no choice but to publicly condemn Lithuania at this Prague conference if no significant progress has been made towards enacting new legislation of Jewish communal property legislation. We will also continue to raise this issue in the US Congress, with European Union bodies, and in the media.

We understand that you will be meeting with LJC later this week and we hope to hear some positive news about this issue following your discussions.

Sincerely,



Ronald S. Lauder
President



Steven Schwager
Co-Chairman, Executive Committee

On behalf of WJRO member organizations: Agudath Israel World Organization; American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors; American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee; B'nai B'rith International; Centre of Organizations of Holocaust Survivors in Israel; Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany; EJC/ECJC Joint European Delegation; Jewish Agency for Israel; World Jewish Congress; World Zionist Organization

Please note that the American Jewish Committee associates itself with this letter as well.