

ACTIVITIES OF THE 1941 PROVISIONAL LITHUANIAN GOVERNMENT WITH REGARD TO JEWISH LITHUANIAN CITIZENS

Statement by the Jewish Community of Lithuania

Lately there has been an increase in the number of articles in the Lithuanian press attempting to evaluate the activities of the Provisional Lithuanian government (PLG) with regard to its Jewish Lithuanian citizens, in the period between June 23 to August 5, 1941.

The Jewish Community of Lithuania (JCL) believes that the very fact of the emergence of the PLG was motivated by a sincere desire to restore Lithuanian independence.

Unfortunately, on the basis of various documents from that period, and studies by historians from Lithuania and abroad, we have to say that, under the influence of overt anti-Semitic activities by the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF), the Provisional Lithuanian government passed a great many anti-Jewish laws, and in so doing, undoubtedly contributed to anti-Jewish sentiments which were escalated both by the LAF, and later by the Nazi occupiers. Sentiments which, prior even to the German army marching into Kaunas and other Lithuanian cities, transformed into the mass killing of Lithuania's Jews. Numerous historical facts bear witness to this reality. Nevertheless, there are some press articles that include entirely positive evaluations of the activities by civil defence and TDA battalions - which the JCL considers to be both completely incomprehensible and a mockery of the memory of the Jewish Lithuanian citizens who were murdered.

The majority of reviewers analysing this theme consciously and unconsciously avoid talking about the connection between the PLG and LAF, but historical sources graphically testify that the LAF played the greatest role in the emergence of the PLG, and that it was instrumental in its development and ideology - which, in reference to the Jews, was anti-Semitic and inflammatory.

The policy of the provisional Lithuanian government, which in many cases was dictated by the LAF, clearly indicated to the Lithuanian population that Jewish Lithuanian citizens were no longer equal to Lithuanians. In that way, not only was the killing element not being stopped, it was, in an odd way, being encouraged. The position of the PLG pushed the Jews of Lithuania beyond the boundaries of the law.

There wasn't a single public PLG statement or other document protesting the mass persecution of Lithuania's Jews, or any other PLG document in which the PLG would have expressed the determination of the government to defend all Lithuanian citizens without reservation, or to abstain from their persecution.

On July 12, 1941, the German envoy Dr. Kleist, who arrived from Berlin in place of Dr. Greffes, definitively told the PLG chairman that there could be no talk of Germany acknowledging the PLG. Despite the fact that the PLG understood that the Nazi authorities would not permit it to achieve its goal of independence, it continued to declare discriminatory anti-Jewish orders, including the shameful "Jewish situation decrees" (deliberated on August 1, just four days prior to the suspension of all PLG activities).

Due to the numerous anti-Jewish orders passed by the PLG, and its inability to distance itself from the anti-Semitic LAF procla-

mations and the context of the onset of the mass killing of Lithuanian Jews, the Jewish Community of Lithuania deems that the actions of the Provisional Lithuanian government are judged to be negative. It was not long before the idea of the restoration of independence changed to one of collaboration with the Nazi occupiers - expressed mostly in discriminatory PLG policies with regard to Lithuania's Jews. The LZB is, unfortunately, therefore unable to find any positive features in the activities of the PLG.

Attempts to evaluate in a positive light the PLG, the declared provisional government of Lithuania - which was incapable of at least verbally defending its Jewish citizens - and to give it total or even partial legitimacy, goes against the interests of Lithuania, and greatly harms its image in the international arena.

The JCL notes that, after the PLG stopped its activities, there were solitary PLG members who later risked their own lives to save Lithuanian Jews - for example, the architect Vytautas Landsbergis-Zemkalis and his family. However, the heroic deeds of solitary people, and the activities of a government as sovereign of a nation, are two different things, connected to individual responsibility for personal behaviour, and decisions made in the name of a nation.

The mass killing of the Jews of Lithuania is a black mark in the history of Lithuania. Unfortunately, the PLG is part of that mark. Let us not create a pretext for future generations to reproach us for trying to retouch that mark.

June 23 of next year will mark seventy years since the June uprising. Practically that very same day, thanks to the LAF storm troopers, its noble task of restoring independence was irretrievably drowned in the blood of innocent Lithuanian Jews. Next year, that same day marks seventy years since the start of the mass killing of Jews, an unprecedented act in the history of Lithuania, which swept away 600 years of the communal life of Lithuanians and Jews. Which will we commemorate?

We believe that it would be more meaningful to contemplate and pray for those who are dead. Let us declare June 22 a day of contemplation and prayer - prayer for the independence of all Lithuanian citizens: Lithuanians and Jews, Tatars and Karaimes, Germans and Russians - all citizens of Lithuania.

Let us honour the victims of the killings, and their memory, by bowing our heads to those Lithuanians who risked their lives to save the Jewish citizens of their country. Let us not try to find and create heroes where there were none. We will not be understood by future generations, and we will not be understood by the international community, which has long since found appropriate moral and political judgement for its miscreants. Let us be free - let us not fear truth. And let us stop feeding, between the lines, the idea to Lithuanian citizens, that back then, a brown occupier meant a lesser evil to Lithuania than a red one. It will not work, for no pseudo-historians or journalists can raise nearly 200,000 murdered Lithuanian Jews from the dead. Let us learn how to live and work for the good of Lithuania, with its history such as it is. No matter how bitter it may be.

Jewish Community of Lithuania