

JERUSALEM



of Lithuania

OUR DUTY TO REMEMBER VICTIMS OF THE HOLOCAUST

Participants at the commemorative meeting in Paneriai on the Day of Commemoration of the Victims of the Genocide of the Jews of Lithuania included Parliament chair Irena Degutienė, members of the Lithuanian Parliament and Government, representatives of the diplomatic corps, chairman of the LJC Dr. Simonas Alperavičius, chair of the Vilnius Jewish Community Faina Kuklianski, Second World War veterans, former partisans and prisoners of ghettos and concentration camps, members of the Vilnius and Ukmergė Jewish communities, and pupils from seven public schools in Vilnius.

Flowers and wreaths from the country's highest leaders, ministries and state institutions, the diplomatic corps, and Jewish communities and organisations were placed at the monument.

The commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust was opened by Parliament chair Irena Degutienė. She asked for a minute of silence in honour of the memory of the victims. "Can there be anything more shameful than the fact that so many people shut their eyes in order not to see that people just like themselves were dying?" - she asked. - Where, during that period, were Christian culture and its frequently proffered ideals hiding?" In her opinion, justice and the right of human beings to call themselves human beings were hidden in "the cellars of Lithuanian peasants, in the homes and families of intellectuals, in church parishes - wherever it was possible to hide and save the greatest victims of the war".

"I bow my head sincerely to all of those who safeguarded hope, and who, in rescuing the Jews, rescued the very essence of humanity," - said I. Degutienė. The Parliament chair extended her sincerest condolences to those people whose families, loved ones, and friends were killed during that terrible time.

In the words of Vilnius Jewish Community chair, lawyer Faina Kuklianski: "The Nazis did not succeed in annihilating all the Jews, who went on to form a community which became a shelter for every Jew living in Lithuania.

Facing the victims who were killed, and those who were saved, we will never be ashamed to say that:

- We will always thank the rescuers, and condemn and seek to publicly name the murderers. Thanks to community member Pinchas Fridberg, a fund has been established to give financial support to the Righteous Among Nations, who have been declared such by the Yad Vashem institute.

- We will never call former ghetto prisoners "anti-fascist bandits", as certain politicians are trying to do, and we will always fight against attempts to deny the Holocaust, whether by

the president of Iran, or by local anti-Semites. In our opinion, statements to the effect that 'the Jews are shaking the Holocaust bludgeon' are both insulting and inadmissible.

- We will never accept a double genocide theory, and we will fight against fabrications that the Jews did not suffer at the hands of the Stalinist regime. The concept of genocide must be defined as it is in the Geneva Convention and in article six of the statute of the International Criminal Court: planned actions directed to-

fellows countrymen - they did not forget them, and commemorated their memory. The elder taught the children that, "no matter where you live, even if you are elsewhere, remember the history of your town, and tell everyone about our brother and sister Jews who once lived here". That is Holocaust education. There was no need for any police or security, people acted naturally, and remembered and talked about the tragedy that had happened. Perhaps there are other officials and schools like this one in Lithuania, but we don't always find out about them because the media are not interested in such things.

We not only express our respect to those who were killed, we must also be responsible to them and to ourselves to ensure that this crime is never repeated."

The commemoration in Paneriai ended with a ritual performed by the students of the seven Vilnius public schools. To the tune of sad violin melodies (played by Boris Kirzneris), they constructed a "Hill of memory" to the Jews who had been killed in Paneriai, out of pebbles painted in the colours of the flags of Lithuania and Israel. Students from the Sholom Aleichem School placed flowers at the foot of the monument, and four of them recited verse in Hebrew and Lithuanian. Lithuanian State Opera and Ballet Theatre soloist Rafailas Karpis sang the funerary Jewish melody "Eli eli". Cantor Shmuel Yatom of the Taharat-a-kodesh synagogue said yizkor and kaddish prayers.

Education program co-ordinator with the Commission for Investigation into the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Regimes, Ingrida Vilkienė, has initiated an activity for pupils throughout the country, entitled "Everyone had a name". Students from ninety-three schools took part in commemorative events in thirty-five Lithuanian towns dedicated to the Day of Commemoration of the Victims of the Genocide of the Jews of Lithuania.

These events took place in school auditoriums, school and public libraries, town centres and cultural institutions, thirty-five tolerance fostering centres, local history museums, forest glades near Holocaust victim memorial plaques and monuments, and in old Jewish cemeteries.

School teachers and directors presented commemorative lessons and spoke to students about pre-war Jewish communities, films on the Holocaust theme were shown, and students talked about what they were able to find out about the Jews - their parents' and grandparents' neighbours.



Children honouring victims of the Holocaust.

wards the annihilation of a specific nation or population group. We believe that it is unethical, illegal, and incorrect to equate the Holocaust with Stalinism. We trust that the local Museum of Victims of the Genocide will find more space therein for the theme of the Holocaust.

- We will continue to demand that the law not separate the rights of ghetto prisoners from those of deportees.

- We are grateful to everyone who takes part in Holocaust education in Lithuania, and we intend to play an active role therein. In this instance I would like to mention the efforts of the American embassy, and the Holocaust Museum in Washington. However, I would also like to tell you about my own experience here in Lithuania.

Yesterday I attended the annual commemoration of the annihilation of the Jews in Nemenčinė - an event that we call "keiveroves". For the last twenty years, i.e., since the restoration of independence in Lithuania, on September 20, the day of the shooting of the Jews of Nemenčinė, the Nemenčinė elders and the teachers and students of the Konstantinas Parčevskis Gymnasium have organised a history lesson at a monument dedicated to those who were killed, in the Nemenčinė woods. Yesterday as well the children had organised a program - the town elder spoke to them about the Jews of Nemenčinė, about their murder, about each little house inhabited by the people who had been killed, and the pupils listed some of the names of the murdered children. A violin student, a novice public performer, played his violin in the forest; his playing, and the concentration of the gathered children, moved me more than any talks and discussions by officials.

The heads of the Nemenčinė community, and the school, did everything that they could for their killed