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March of the Living in Vilnius Recalls the Great Tragedy that Happened Here

May 1, 2011

The March of the Living is taking place for the third time in Vilnius. This is a procession from the Ponar railway station to the Ponar memorial, the stretch of road that Vilna Ghetto prisoners walked before they were murdered in the Ponar forest. This march reminds the world of the great tragedy which happened here, in Lithuania, where 220,000 Jews lived before the Second World War. More than ninety percent of the Jewish community were exterminated during the Nazi occupation.

We present for your consideration a speech prepared by Sergejus Kanovičius, poet and public figure, for the March of the Living. He was prevented by circumstances from taking part in the march but sent the text of his speech to bernadinai.lt

“You, tens of thousands of our brothers and sisters, are laid here in the pits of Ponar only because you were Jews. Only because someone decided that you are not part of this earth and this sky. Because you were Jews, you paid the highest price: your lives and the lives of your children. You and your children — our brothers and sisters — are here, under the turf of the Ponar forest, because you experienced the price of the *silence* of the world and your neighbors. The price at which chickens are hidden but neighbors are given up to the slaughter house. And today, your sacrifice appears small to some. And today bullets of maliciousness are flying at you, although you have already been shot. And today under the bright Lithuanian sky “Juden raus” is heard, and today over the former ghetto, to which you never returned, wave the banners of the Third Reich. And today the silence of our neighbors is still killing you and us.

“They took your life away. And there are those who continue to try and assassinate your memory — again, today, almost without resistance and with impunity, now and again, the spirit of swastikas and the white armbands of the LAF overshadows the Jerusalem of Lithuania. And today there are those who still desire to see your executioners as heroes. And still today they attempt to portray the heroes who fought your executioners as criminals, and publicly call the Nuremberg Trial and the Holocaust a farce, with complete impunity. And still today they won’t let you rest in peace.

“Seventy thousand unlived lives. And there are those for whom these sacrifices to Lithuania seem wanting. And today the genocide museum of free Lithuania cannot find space for you, although the woods of the cities, towns and villages of Lithuania are one giant museum of the genocide of Lithuanian Jews...

“Brothers and sisters. Rest in peace. Lord, give eternal peace to the Jews in Ponar forest and across Lithuania who were murdered without cause. And forgive us the sin of our silence.”