

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE “TOLERANCE AND TOTALITARIANISM.
CHALLENGES TO FREEDOM”**

16 November 2011, Vilnius
The Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum

“To practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another, as good neighbours” - this common goal of the peoples of the world is set out in the Preamble to the United Nations Charter.

The peoples of the world who suffered losses of the Second World War and the horror of the Holocaust have developed the framework of the international law, international and national state institutions and nongovernmental organizations to overcome anti-Semitism, xenophobia and other forms of racial discrimination, aiming to protect human rights and freedoms, so that peoples and states would live in peace harmony, ensuring the progress of mankind.

However, new challenges arise in the 21st century. Even countries with old democratic traditions have failed to prevent the recurrence of old conflicts on the grounds of ethnic, religious, social hatred or unexpected attacks by extremists.

The global economic crisis that increases the threats of radicalism and extremism is a serious challenge for democracy and tolerance. Moreover, the newest technology not only reduces the isolation of members of international community and various ethnic and social groups, provides greater freedom for cultural dialogue and exchange of information, but also sometimes serves as a tool for instigators of discord. Thus, the mission announced by the United Nations is still incomplete and requires efforts of many people of good-will.

In the 20th century, Lithuania found itself at the very epicentre of totalitarian regimes and blood shed, suffered the Holocaust, and lost not only lives of many of its citizens, but also its own statehood. On the long and difficult path towards freedom and democracy, the re-established state of Lithuania openly looks at its complex historical past, aiming to foster respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms and to contribute to the preservation of common human values, also to the spread of democracy and tolerance.

On the occasion of the International Day for Tolerance, Vilnius will host a conference as part of the governmental programme of the commemorative events of the Holocaust Memorial Year in Lithuania. Participants of the conference are invited to share their experiences and insights when discussing tolerance situation in today’s world, background of anti-Semitism, xenophobia and other forms of hatred, and how to overcome their manifestations in the new geopolitical, social and media context.

The conference will also mark the 35th anniversary of activities of the Helsinki Group.

On the basis of the rights and freedoms set out in the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, dissidents of the Soviet Union formed a group in 1976 that aimed to encourage the society to oppose the totalitarian regime that was accompanied by all the forms of anti-Semitism and discrimination. The group defended democratic values, struggled for a variety of opinion, the freedom of expression, religion and other fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Among the founders of the Lithuanian Public Group for Furthering the Implementation of the Helsinki Agreements there were Rev. Karolis Garuckas, a Catholic priest, Eitan Finkelstein, Ph.D. (Physics), Ona Lukauskaitė Poškienė, poet and former prisoner, Viktoras Petkus, former political prisoner, and poet, translator Tomas Venclova.

Organizers: The Office of the Prime Minister of Lithuania, the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Participants: representatives from Lithuanian and foreign academic and creative communities, ethnic and religious communities and organizations, the makers and executors of policy, the diplomatic corps, media and civil society representatives who take interest in freedom and democracy, respect for human rights and freedoms, and the values of tolerance in the modern world, as well as in historical past.

16 November

The opening of the conference and working sessions at the Tolerance Centre of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum (Naugarduko Street 10 / 2)

10.00 – 10.10 a.m.

Welcome speech to the participants of the conference

Audronius Ažubalis, Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, former member of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group

10.10.—12.00 p.m. noon

The 1st session. **In the grip of totalitarianism and freedom of expression. Freedom of thought, free speech and freedom of action in captivity of totalitarian thinking**

Moderator: Markas Zingeris, writer, Director of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum

Speakers:

Eitan Finkelstein, former member of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group, scientist, journalist (Germany)

Andrey Piontkovskiy, Leading researcher, Institute for Systems Studies (Russia)

Shmuel Ben-Zvi, Director, Israel Radio International ‘The Voice of Israel’

Alexander Daniel, Member of the Board of International Memorial Society

Prof. Dr. Gintautas Mažeikis, the Head of the Social and Political Theories Department of Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University

Answering questions, a discussion

12.00 – 1.30 p.m. – Lunch

1.30 – 3.00 p.m.

The 2nd session. **Anti-Semitism, xenophobia, racism, discrimination. Totalitarian temptations and new trials of tolerance**

Moderator: Ronaldas Račinskas, the Executive Director of the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania

Speakers:

Emanuelis Zingeris, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Seimas (Parliament) of Lithuania

Hannah Rosenthal, the U.S. State Department’s Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism (U.S.A.)

Prof. Irena Veisaitė, Professor of Vilnius Pedagogical University, German philologist, culturologist, Tolerance Prize winner

Prof. Dr. Šarūnas Liekis, Dean of the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy at Kaunas Vytautas Magnus University

Discussion

3.00—3.30 p.m. Coffee break

3.30—5.00 p.m.

The 3rd session. **Religious liberty at the crossroads of tolerance. Landmarks of a free society.**

Moderator: Andrius Navickas, Tolerance Prize winner, philosopher, Editor-in-Chief of the internet portal Bernardinai.lt

Speakers:

Simonas Alperavičius, Chairman of the Lithuanian Jewish Community

Priest Julius Sasnauskas, OFM

Prof. Euhén Dyky, Deputy Chairman, Foundation “Jewish Forum of Ukraine” (Ukraine)

Rev. Tomas Šernas, General Superintendent of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Lithuania.

Prof. Halina Kobeckaitė, the former first Director of the Department of National Minorities

Discussion

5.30—6.30 p.m.

Discussion

5. 00 — 5.30 p.m.

Special part, dedicated to the activities of the Lithuanian Helsinki Group. Moderator: M.Zingeris, Director of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum

A minute of reflection. Musical introduction

Historian **Rolandas Gustaitis** presents the history of the Helsinki Group (photo/video installation)

Witness of the Helsinki Group’s activities, translator **Irena Balčiūnienė** shares her memories.

The ceremony of presenting awards to former member of the Helsinki Group Viktoras Petkus. Lithuanian Foreign Minister A.Ažubalis confers the award.

A glass of champagne.