

Rachel Margolis
(fact sheet, revised October 2010)

1. Rachel (Yiddish: Rokhl) Margolis was born in Vilna (then Polish Wilno, now Vilnius, capital of Lithuania) on 28 October 1921 to a prominent medical family (her father was one of the leading radiologists in the city). She was incarcerated in the Vilna Ghetto until its final month (Sept. 1943) when she fled into the forests to join the anti-Nazi partisan groups fighting against the Germans and their local collaborators. Her parents and brother were murdered in the Holocaust. Information about her life is available at

<http://keeneweb.org/cohencenter/rachel-margolis-lithuanian-partisan-and-survivor/>
<http://www.rachelmargolis.com/>
<http://www.brandeis.edu/magazine/0703/pages/margolis.pdf>,
<http://www.docscopic.info/flashoflight/RachelMargolisIII.html>
<http://www.thejc.com/articles/the-holocaust-survivors-facing-war-crimes-trials>
http://www.dovidkatz.net/dovid/Lithuania/ROKHL_MARGOLIS-1.pdf
http://www.dovidkatz.net/dovid/Lithuania/ROKHL_MARGOLIS-2.pdf

2. After the war, Rachel studied biology, and taught and worked as a researcher at Vilnius University for over 40 years.

3. During and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Rachel helped set up the Green House Holocaust Exhibit (now on Pamenkalnio Street in Vilnius), which is widely considered to be the major exposition on the Holocaust in the country today.

4. In the 1990s, she searched for and found the archived diary of the (non-Jewish) Polish journalist K. Sakowicz, who witnessed the murders of tens of thousands of (mostly Jewish) civilians at Ponar (Paneriai), the mass murder site outside Vilnius. She painstakingly transcribed the text and published it in the original Polish in 1999. Two German editions have appeared, and in 2005 an English edition, edited by Y. Arad, was brought out by Yale University Press.

5. An antisemitic article that appeared in a Lithuanian daily newspaper on 29 January called on prosecutors to prosecute the former Jewish partisan Fania Brantsovsky on the basis of a sentence in Rachel's own memoir (published in Vilnius, in Russian, in 2005, English translation complete and waiting for a publisher). It also called on prosecutors to summon Rachel Margolis as a material witness.

6. On 5 May 2008, two armed plainclothes officers from a regional prosecutor's office appeared unannounced at Rachel Margolis's registered address in Vilnius, bearing a document calling for her testimony in a war crimes investigation against Fania Brantsovsky. Report [here](#).

7. On 28 May 2008, a senior prosecutor in the Office of the Special Investigations in the Prosecutor General's Office told BNS (Baltic News Service) that "Lithuanian judicial authorities are also searching for Rachele Margolis, but Prosecutor Vaitiekuniene said she had no information about her." This gave the misimpression that Margolis, who has been resident in Rechovot, Israel since the mid 1990s, except for the summer months when she would visit Vilnius to deliver her lectures on the Vilna Ghetto, is somehow "in hiding" or a "fugitive," a misimpression often repeated on antisemitic internet sites. There has never been a retraction or apology.

8. On 1 August 2008, three members of the Congress of the United States, Paul Hodes, Robert Wexler (chairman of the subcommittee on Europe) and Howard Berman (Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs), issued an appeal to the prime minister of Lithuania concerning the persecution of Holocaust survivors who joined the anti-Nazi partisan resistance to survive. The letter (fully accessible at: <http://www.genshoah.org/CongressForLJC080108.pdf>), contains the text: "We are particularly concerned about Lithuanian legal authorities' repeated inquiries with Rachel Margolis, allegedly as part of an investigation into the wartime conduct of Soviet partisans. As you may be aware, Ms. Margolis recently published her memoirs recounting her experiences as a survivor of the Vilna Ghetto and heroic efforts as a fighter in the Lithuanian anti-Nazi resistance movement. After the war, Ms. Margolis helped to found Vilnius' Green House, whose mission is to educate about Lithuania's history during the Holocaust. [...] She moved to Israel, but continued to return to Lithuania to give tours of the Green House museum during the summer, when international tourism is at its peak. Unfortunately this summer, Ms. Margolis will not be travelling to Lithuania, because she fears that she will be the object of harassment and intimidation, and of continued defamation by the Lithuanian media. It is our understanding that on May 5 [...] police initiated a search for Mrs. Margolis, as part of an investigation into alleged war crimes. This is truly an unfortunate turn of events, given that Ms. Margolis was honored by the former Prime Minister of Lithuania in 2005 for her heroism fighting in the anti-Nazi resistance. Today, Ms. Margolis' autobiographical works are unconscionably being used to build a case against her

and other partisans. Disturbingly, certain Lithuania media outlets have referred to Ms. Margolis and other prominent former anti-Nazi resistance heroes Fania Brantsovsky and Yitzhak Arad as terrorists and murderers, giving rise to serious concerns about anti-Jewish sentiment in national media. [...] Ms. Margolis and other partisans should not have to live in fear from reprisals, media defamation or harassment from authorities. We further request your assistance in helping us understand the sudden energetic pursuit of investigations into the activities of Jewish partisans, in contrast to the failure of Lithuanian prosecutors to develop cases against Nazi collaborators since Lithuania's independence in 1991."

9. On 25 August 2008, the ambassadors in Vilnius representing the Czech Republic, Finland, Iceland, Ireland, Sweden, United Kingdom and the United States of America, and the Chargés d'affaires of Austria, Canada and France, issued a letter to Rachel Margolis which included the text: "We the undersigned, Ambassadors and representatives of Embassies accredited to the Republic of Lithuania, are aware that you have in the past been accustomed to offer tours of historical Jewish areas and sites in Vilnius. We wish to express our appreciation of the contribution you have in this way made to perpetuating the memory of a vibrant community and cultural tradition, tragically all but extinguished during the Holocaust. The few survivors have earned the right to be treated with respect, consideration and understanding. We understand that recently you have hesitated to return to Vilnius to resume your tours. We regret the circumstances which kept you away, and deprived others of the benefit of your memory and experience. We would like you to know that, should you decide to visit Vilnius again, we would be interested in participating in one of your tours as an expression of our collective esteem for your role in keeping alive the appreciation of that which must not be forgotten."

10. The Vilna Gaon Jewish Museum's official bulletin in October 2008 included the text: "To Rachel Margolis: Dear Rachel, we, those who worked close with you express our deep disappointment and anger that you cannot come this year because of known circumstances... You had to cancel your ticket and many students who come to the Yiddish institute and visitors to our museum are denied the unique possibility to listen to your full of authentic knowledge and wit lectures about Vilna, your native city, the cradle of spiritual scholarship, and about the war. We hope to see you soon, we believe that!"

11. On June 19th 2009, a Rachel Margolis event was held in Tel Aviv, addressed by the Israeli ambassador to Latvia and Lithuania. Dr Margolis received a certificate of honor from the British House of Lords, signed by Lord Janner of Braunstone. [Report on the event here.](#)

12. In December 2009, five members of the United States Congress wrote to the leaders of Lithuania concerning Dr Margolis and the other defamed Jewish partisans. [Text of the letter here.](#) [Report here.](#)

13. In May 2010, the English edition of Rachel Margolis's Russian memoir was published in the United States. Titled *A Partisan from Vilna*, it was brought out by Academic Studies Press in Boston, with a preface by Antony Polonsky.

14. To this day, Rachel Margolis has never been apprised of any subpoena or charges, nor has she been given notice of safe passage that would enable her to safely return to Lithuania without fear of interrogation, harassment or other interference.

15. It is a violation of Rachel Margolis's human rights that she has been the victim of police searches, defamatory press releases from state prosecutors and a campaign of degradation, without being subpoenaed or charged with anything at all. It is a blow to authentic Holocaust education that Ms. Margolis, a dual Lithuanian-Israeli citizen, is unable, approaching her 90th year of life, to return to her native city and to continue to teach and to lecture. We respectfully request that Rachel Margolis be given immediate notification that she is not wanted or required for any investigation or interrogation and is free to return to Vilnius without fear of disturbance, and is free to resume her lectures on Holocaust and other issues.

16. There have been various diplomatic entreaties to present and former leaders of Lithuania, and to the Lithuanian ambassador in Tel Aviv to reach out to Rachel Margolis, even with the symbolic gesture of visiting her in Rechovot, of a letter offering to meet her at Vilnius airport and congratulating her on the appearance of the English edition of her newest book, or simply a nice letter of appreciation for her life's achievements and work. Hopefully these efforts will lead to some positive result during Rachel's lifetime. She turns 89 on October 28th 2010.