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Lithuanian Military Officer Jonas Noreika Not Guilty of Holocaust Crimes

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Controversial Lithuanian military officer Jonas Noreika didn't participate in the mass murder of Jews in Lithuania during World War II, but the Nazi occupational regime did involve him in matters connected with the isolation of Jews, according to the Center for Research on the Genocide and Resistance of the Residents of Lithuania.

The center drafted this report following a demand by a group of public figures for a plaque bearing Noreika's name to be removed from the library of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences, claiming he collaborated with the Nazis during the German occupation of Lithuania. The plaque commemorates Noreika as an anti-Soviet fighter.

The center's report was released to the public but addressed to the Government chancellor, the mayor of Vilnius and the Academy of Sciences chief librarian. It reads in part: "during the German occupation Jonas Noreika did not participate in operations for the mass extermination of Jews in the districts of Telšiai and Šiauliai."

The document cautions Noreika's actions "cannot be judged categorically."

The center states Noreika's actions when he held the post of head of the Šiauliai district involved the isolation of Jews. His order to settle Jews into a ghetto was announced in 1941.

The report continues: "the Nazi occupational regime was able to involve him as it did other civilian administration officials in ordering matters connected with the isolation of Jews."

The center says in later years during the German occupation Noreika contributed to ruining the establishment of an SS legion in Lithuania, and that he was imprisoned in the Stutthof concentration camp after that. After Soviet occupation was restored, he contributed to preparations to organize an uprising in the event of war. The Lithuanian National Council he and his fellow travelers established had for their goal the reestablishment of an independent Lithuania.

Noreika was executed in 1947 following trial by Soviet military tribunal.

Public figures calling for the removal of the plaque commemorating Noreika claim the establishment of a ghetto was part and parcel of the Holocaust, and that Noreika "collaborated closely with the Nazi regime and contributed in fact and deed to the destruction of the Jews of Lithuania." Signatories to the letter include the philosopher Leonidas Donskis and the poets Antanas A.Jonynas and Tomas Venclova.

The Center for Research on the Genocide and Resistance of the Residents of Lithuania also made public their report on the actions of officer, diplomat and founder of the Lithuanian Activist Front Kazys Škirpa. The center reported he was a Lithuanian patriot and that he expended much energy for the establishment of an independent state and in organizing resistance to the Soviet occupational regime, but that his actions in the 1940-1941 period did include expressions of anti-Semitism.

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The Lithuanian Jewish Community responds to a report presented by the Center for the Study of the Genocide and Resistance of the Residents of Lithuania about the activity of Jonas Noreika in Nazi-occupied Lithuania during World War II.



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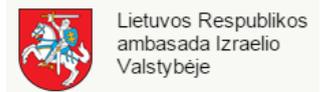
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