

LITHUANIA DEMANDS SURVIVORS RETRACT EXPLICIT HOLOCAUST REPORT

BY DAVID LEV,
ISRAEL NATIONAL NEWS

An organization in Tel Aviv that chronicles and records the history of Lithuanian Jews and their decimation in the Holocaust is likely to be sued by the Lithuanian government – over a scholarly study released over 13 years ago.

“It’s strange that for 13 years this study never bothered them, and that now, all of the sudden, the Lithuanian government is worried about the honor of its murderous countrymen,” says Tel Aviv Attorney Yosef Melamed sarcastically in an interview with Arutz Sheva. “And while I wouldn’t necessarily choose to go to court to defend our accusations, I am more than prepared to do so.”

At issue is a study released over a decade ago by the organization Melamed directs, the Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel. The study catalogs thousands of Lithuanian murderers of Jews – officials and ordinary citizens who did the “dirty work” for the Nazis, enthusiastically organizing and directing the destruction of Lithuanian Jewry, an effort, Melamed says

grimly, that destroyed 96% of the country’s pre-war Jewish population.

They began to murder Jews months before the Nazis arrived, claiming that the Jews were disloyal for preferring the hated Russian occupiers to the Nazis, hardly surprising if you were a Jew.

Melamed sent the study, called “Lithuania: Crime and Punishment,” to the Lithuanian Justice Minister, who did nothing with the report. No one was brought to trial.

Until several months ago, that is, when Lithuania sought an investigation into the Association, with the intent of preparing a case against it for “defamation of character” against nine individuals named in the report who in recent years have been named Lithuanian “national heroes.”

One of those named, for example, is Juozas Lukša, who is celebrated in Lithuania as a fighter against Communism, escaping through the Iron Curtain to the West in 1947 and seeking to raise consciousness against the Soviet occupation of the country. In 1950 he secretly returned to Lithuania, and was killed by the Soviets in 1951.

While in Western Europe, Lukša wrote a book called *Fighters for Freedom*, depict-

ing the suffering of the Lithuanians under the Soviet thumb. Less well known in the West, however, was Lukša’s role in persecuting and murdering Jews, the Association says. In 1941, for example, Lukša was an officer in the Lithuanian army and participated in a pogrom in the city of *Kaunas*, helping fellow murderer Viktoras Vitkauskas murder Rabbi Zalman Ossovski, beheading him, and placing his head in a window to show off their accomplishment.

“The others are just as bad. We have witnesses, documentation, and whatever else is necessary to defend these charges in court,” says Melamed, 86, himself a survivor who managed to escape the clutches of the Nazis – and the Lithuanians – fighting both of them as a partisan. “In Lithuania, the people enthusiastically took on the task of murdering the Jews, saving the Nazis the trouble,” he says. “In general, the Lithuanians were considered the cruelest nationality during the war, far worse than the Poles or even the Ukrainians.” Oddly, it wasn’t the Lithuanian Justice Ministry that physically tried to serve the Association with papers – it was the Justice

Ministry of the State of Israel. “As part of international agreements, the Lithuanians asked the Israelis to open an investigation into their case, and demanded from us documentation and information.”

Which is very hypocritical of the Lithuanians, Melamed says. “During all the years we have been researching the Lithuanian massacre of Jews, the government there has never willingly turned over even one document.”

Now, 13 years later, “Lithuania has decided that the time has come to ‘clear’ the names of its ‘heroes,’ in order to propagate its image as a staunch defender of Western values against the Communists. But the facts are the facts, and no matter how much ‘cleaning up’ the Lithuanians do, they cannot change the testimony of those who saw with their own eyes how their countrymen – including these ‘heroes’ – participated enthusiastically in the destruction of Lithuanian Jewry.”

Melamed is ready for a court case, he says – as long as it takes place in Israel. “I cannot go to Lithuania,” he says. “If I go there I won’t come back alive. That’s the way they do things there.”

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MAKING SENSE OF TROUBLESOME TIMES

ASYV FOURTEENTH ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONFERENCE ON HOLOCAUST EDUCATION

The Education Department of the American Society for Yad Vashem and their Young Leadership Associates held its fourteenth professional development conference on Holocaust education. The Association of Teachers of Social Studies /United Federation of Teachers and the School of Education of Manhattanville College co-sponsored the program this year. Participants in this year's program, which included educators from all five boroughs of New York City and from the tri-state area, received In-Service credits for completing the conference. The program also included a panel display of the Legend of the Lodz Ghetto Curriculum created and developed by the International School for Holocaust Studies of Yad Vashem, Jerusalem.

Commissioner Salvatore Cassano of the FDNY and Dr. Samuel Klagsbrun, Executive Medical Director of Four Winds Hospital, were the keynote speakers. Carolyn Herbst, Past President/Past Chairperson of the ATSS/UFT talked about how this conference is a valuable resource for increasing awareness and sensitivity to intolerance and injustice. In her remarks to the conference participants, she emphasized the importance of learning from the lessons of the Holocaust and applying these lessons to teaching about human rights issues and making these messages meaningful to our students.

This year's theme, "Making Sense of Troublesome Times: Challenges and Solutions – A Retrospective – The Holocaust, 9/11 and More," presented educators with strategies on how to incorporate Holocaust studies into their lesson plans and curricula, making these themes and topics relevant when teaching about the events of 9/11. The workshop themes complemented the keynote speakers' remarks: "Strategies in Teaching about the Events of 9/11"; "Using Survivor Testimonies in the Classroom"; "Art of Children from the Holocaust – Studying an Artifact"; and "Propaganda, Character Development and Anti-bullying Behavior: Its Impact on Our Youth."

Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American Society for Yad vashem, said, "We put a

face on Holocaust victims in order to introduce a human element to the story. Transmitting these messages is our hope for the future. We are grateful to you, the teachers, whose responsibility it is to educate future generations about the Holocaust, when there will be no more survivors left to tell the story." Commenting on the 30th anniversary of the American Society, Mr. Zborowski

"What makes today very special for me is that my oldest child, Rebecca, who bears my grandmother's name, is here with me. It is the first time she has come to a Yad Vashem event. It is her first time beginning to learn about what her great-grandparents and their parents, cousins, uncles, aunts, sisters, and brothers lived through. It is time for her to begin to learn about the strength

standing up to lies and preserving the truth is imperative. I want her to know that over the years, we have had the privilege of touching, meeting, and educating thousands of teachers. And, through your dedication and work, tens of thousands of students across the New York City metropolitan area have been touched and have learned about the Holocaust.

"And why does it matter? Because as the years pass, people become more audacious in their claims that the Holocaust never happened. The lies abound not just in Iran, where the officials say that the Holocaust never happened, but right here in our great country...Most of all, I want to thank each one of you for being here. Your efforts and commitment are the building blocks that will protect all of us from ever seeing horrors like the Holocaust again."

Commissioner Cassano spoke about the importance of commemorating and learning about the events of 9/11 and the significance of education in preventing such horrific events from repeating themselves. He reminded us of the similarities in teaching about the Holocaust and the events of 9/11 because of the similar themes that should be considered: understanding human behavior, the dangers of extreme and baseless hatred, creating remembrance and public memory, commemorating the event, remembering and honoring the memory of the heroes and the victims, and ensuring they are not forgotten. Commissioner Cassano also talked about the challenges the FDNY continues to face in a post-9/11 era, how the events of 9/11 impacted the FDNY, and how these challenges are met. He also took questions from the audience.

Our first Conference was held in 1999. With each yearly Conference, we have moved towards our collective goal to empower educators with an educationally enriching experience so that they are better equipped to transmit the lessons of the Holocaust to their students. In 2002, when we offered educators the opportunity to participate in our first post-9/11 professional development program, Dr. Samuel Klagsbrun was our keynote speaker. Using

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Caroline Massel, Co-Chair, Young Leadership Associates; Rebecca Massel; Eli Zborowski, Chairman of the American Society for Yad Vashem; Dr. Marlene W. Yahalom, Director of Education; Tali Yahalom, Young Leadership Associates; Commissioner Salvatore Cassano, FDNY, keynote speaker.

added that continuing the efforts and accomplishments of the American Society in education and remembrance is critical to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive. He applauded the success of its Education Department and Young Leadership Associates in this venture.

Caroline Massel, Co-Chair of the Young Leadership Associates, welcomed the participants and spoke about the deep commitment she has, as a grandchild of Holocaust survivors, to the cause of Holocaust remembrance. She commended the attendees for their shared dedication to Holocaust remembrance through education by their presence at the program – dedicating a day off to join colleagues to learn more about strategies to teach about the Holocaust in the classroom.

of her people and her family. It is time for her to begin to learn about the unbelievable acts of kindness performed by countless Righteous Gentiles.

"For my family, today we begin the process of transmitting the stories of what my family lived through to the next generation.

"While my daughter will begin to learn about what happened to her family, today, I am hopeful that she will learn another lesson. Not everyone who learns about or teaches the Holocaust and its lessons has a direct familial connection to the Holocaust. What I hope she begins to learn today is that there are people, like many of you here, who have no connection to the Holocaust but are staunchly committed to the truth and to teaching the next generation what happened over 70 years ago. There are people who understand that

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