

AJC, Lithuanian Jewish Community Urge Seimas Not to Honor Lithuanian Wartime Activist



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American Jewish Committee (AJC) and the Lithuanian Jewish Community are jointly calling on the Speaker of the Seimas, Lithuania's legislature, to stop a resolution honoring a member of the antisemitic Lithuanian Activist Front.

"We are deeply troubled to learn that the Seimas will entertain a resolution which would dedicate 2021 the Year of Juozas Lukša-Daumantas, an active member of the World War II-era Lithuanian Activist Front," wrote Rabbi Andrew Baker, AJC Director of International Jewish Affairs, and Faina Kukliansky, Chairwoman, Lithuanian Jewish Community, in their letter to Seimas Speaker Viktoras Pranckietis.

Founded in Berlin, the Lithuanian Activist Front was an early ally of the Nazis in the occupation of Lithuania. Many of its members were directly involved in the persecution and murder of Lithuanian Jews. Its vision of an independent Lithuania was of an ethnically "pure" homeland with no place for Jewish citizens.

"We implore you to take no action which might give honor to any leader or prominent member of the Lithuanian Activist Front," wrote Baker and Kukliansky. "Instead you should defer such matters to the International Commission for Evaluating the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupational Regimes appointed by the Lithuanian president for a clear and critical understanding of this tragic period in the country's history."

It may not be possible to provide irrefutable evidence that proves Lukša-Daumantas was guilty of war crimes in the persecution of Jews eighty years ago. But that is not relevant to the Seimas resolution, wrote Baker and Kukliansky.

“There is today a worldwide reckoning with history and growing recognition in all Western democracies that even past leaders of great accomplishment must forfeit any honor if they were also racists, bigots, or anti-Semites. Surely Lithuania should do no less,” stated the letter to the Seimas Speaker.

Baker and Kukliansky, who also serve as co-chairpersons of the Lithuanian Goodwill Foundation, expressed appreciation for “the warm cooperative relationship” they have had with Speaker Pranckietis. “We know we share a common commitment to maintain the legacy and history of Jewish life in Lithuania and to build an inclusive and tolerant future. It is in this spirit that we write to you.”

The Lithuanian Jewish Community is an AJC international partner.

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