

RABBI MOSHE HAUER

Executive Vice President

September 8, 2020

The Honorable Gitanas Nauseda
President of the Republic of Lithuania
Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania
S. Daukanto aikste 3
Vilnius 01122
Lithuania

His Excellency President Nauseda:

I write to you to express our opposition to the National Congress Center project, with its plan to construct a Convention Center and Concert Hall over the historical Old Jewish Cemetery in the Snipiskes section of Vilnius. The Old Jewish Cemetery contains the remains of thousands of Jewish residents of Vilnius, with gravestones dated as early as 1487. Amongst those buried in this historic site are some of Vilnius' greatest authors, whose works are studied to this very day by the many thousands of students in the Talmudic academies – established to perpetuate the Lithuanian Talmudic scholarly tradition - here in the United States, in the State of Israel, and the world over.

The Old Jewish Cemetery at Pirašmuntas, in the Šnipiškės (Šnipiškės) district of Vilnius, is the largest in Lithuania. Purchased by the Jewish community with royal permission as freehold property to serve as the eternal resting place for their deceased, it was expanded over the centuries by further adjacent land purchases, with interments in the range of fifty to seventy thousand.

This cemetery has been desecrated and violated repeatedly. Under the Soviet regime, a sports palace was built on the site. After Lithuania gained independence, two apartment complexes were erected there. And now, there is a plan in place to convert the building and a new annex into the Vilnius National Convention and Conference Center.

This plan has been opposed and denounced by Jewish leadership the world over. It represents an affront to the international Jewish community and our historic heritage and is a violation of basic human dignity. It has thus been opposed not only by the Jewish community, but by Senators and members of Congress of the United States.

Our organization – the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America - is the largest umbrella organization of orthodox synagogues and affiliated agencies and groups in the United States and Canada. Our members, over 400,000 individuals, are located across the United States and the world and are active in all aspects of civic and political life. Our leadership meets regularly with bipartisan members of Congress as well as with White House officials, and we are engaged on an ongoing basis on issues involving domestic and international affairs.

We join in expressing our forceful opposition to this project. We hope and expect that under Your Excellency's leadership a different site will be found for the convention center project, and that Your Excellency's government will dedicated efforts to restoring the dignity of this historic site and of all those interred there.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Moshe Hauer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Rabbi Moshe Hauer
Executive Vice President
Orthodox Union