

March 6, 2024

The Honorable Dr. Arūnas Gelūnas
Chairman
Snipiskes Memorial Working Group

Dear Dr. Gelūnas

The results of the Snipiskes Working Group are truly significant, heralding a genuine and positive turn. We are deeply grateful for “the commitment on the part of Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė and the Government of the Republic of Lithuania to restore the history of Vilnius for its residents, wherever they may be and whatever fate may have befallen them, to reclaim the lost history, respect, and dignity for this place, also *acknowledging* the decision to no longer develop this area for commercial purposes and to dedicate the memorial site in the current Vilnius Palace of Concerts and Sports to our shared Lithuanian Jewish history, honouring the memory of those members of the Jewish community who are laid to rest in the Jewish cemetery of Šnipiškės.”

The state of the Snipiskes cemetery has for decades been an issue of concern for our communities worldwide. This concern was again expressed in a “public proclamation” circulated to the Working Group several weeks ago. That concern is genuine, and the values expressed in that letter correctly reflect the values of the Orthodox community. A Jewish cemetery never loses its status as a sacred place and that status must be safeguarded. Snipiskes presents a painful challenge to these values due to the gross violation of the site under the Soviet regime, including paving it over and building on it. This tragic desecration of this sacred place will never be able to be properly reversed. Our shared responsibility in creating the current agreement was to restore as much as possible of its dignity as a Jewish cemetery.

Given the unique challenges in this situation, we joined with a number of our sister organizations representing a large proportion of the Orthodox community worldwide and engaged with Rabbi Sarel Rosenberg of Bnei Beraq, Israel, an important authority on Jewish law, to seek his guidance in navigating the issues with fidelity to Jewish law (Halacha). The positions that we advocated for within the Working Group were formulated with his guidance, and he has reviewed and accepted the final agreement. We are grateful to you and to all the members of the Working Group for your respect for the concerns of the worldwide Orthodox community and your openness to our perspective.


As the planning of the project proceeds, we look forward to properly representing our community’s Halachic concerns in the Supervisory Committee overseeing the plans for the Memorial - including both the building and the cemetery grounds - as defined in the Working Group document:

Agreeing that a Supervisory Committee, including members of the Working Group, will be tasked with overseeing plans for the development of the Memorial. On matters of Halachic concern, those plans should reflect the views of those major Orthodox Jewish organizations represented on the Working Group (Agudah Israel, Orthodox Union, and the CER.)

We again express appreciation for the truly significant results of the Working Group process and look forward to seeing a meaningful measure of dignity restored to this sacred place.



Rabbi Abba Cohen
Vice President for Government Affairs
Agudath Israel of America



Rabbi Moshe Hauer
Executive Vice President
Orthodox Union



Rabbi Moshe Lebel
Rabbinical Director
Conference of European Rabbis