

November 27, 2019

**Press Release:**

**Gaon Commemorative Coin: Contempt and Derision**

An international coalition of groups and individuals working to save the Snipiskes Jewish Cemetery in Vilnius Lithuania described the issuance of a commemorative coin in honor of the 300<sup>th</sup> birthday of the Gaon of Vilna as a 'rare display of cynicism.'

Snipiskes is the cemetery where the Gaon once lay, and continues to house the remains of the Gaon's entire family, among other sages, scholars, and sacred people. After enabling the construction of two large apartment complexes in the cemetery, the Lithuanian government continues to refuse to divulge the location of the remains of thousands of Jews exhumed during construction. The group reports efforts since 2005 to have the remains reburied.

Currently, the Lithuanian government intends to convert a Soviet built Sports Palace standing in the cemetery to a massive Concert and Convention Center which will permanently desecrate the sacred site. Members of the Coalition, descendants of those buried here, and leading Rabbis have travelled to Lithuania to express strong opposition to this plan.

The Gaon of Vilna was a fervent advocate of the Dignity of the Dead and defender of the sanctity of the Snipiskes cemetery. From this perspective, the Lithuanian government's issuance of this coin has become an act of contempt and derision of all that is holy to Jewish teaching and culture.

The following members of the Coalition have agreed to make themselves available to members of the press. (Affiliations are for identification only.)

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