
**Moetzes
Gedolei HaTorah
of America**



**מועצת
גדולי התורה
באמריקה**

September 16, 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

Your Excellency:

The Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah (Council of Torah Sages) of America respectfully conveys its firm opposition to the plan to build a convention center and concert hall over the Old Jewish Cemetery in the Shnipeshok section of Vilnius, and implores you to take immediate steps to prevent this unconscionable desecration.

The Council of Torah Sages of America is a body consisting of a group of senior rabbinical leaders, most of whom serve as deans of Jewish academies where the Talmud and other sacred Jewish texts are studied utilizing “the Lithuanian method” – a highly analytical style of learning developed in the great Lithuanian Jewish academies.

We are deeply troubled by reports of plans to do construction on the site of the Old Jewish Cemetery in Shnipeshok. This must not happen.

The cemetery in Shnipeshok occupies a prominent place in the hearts of Jews the world over. Great sages and scholars, whose piety and leadership are revered still today, and whose written scholarship is studied still today, are buried there. All cemeteries deserve respect; the Old Jewish Cemetery in Shnipeshok deserves special respect.

As a matter of Jewish law it is prohibited to build on the site of a cemetery – not only because such building disturbs the remains of those who are buried in the cemetery, but also because the cemetery is considered hallowed space and building upon it is seen as a desecration of the holy.

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Furthermore, burial plots were purchased by individuals whose ownership rights in the graves passed on to their children, and then to their grandchildren and great grandchildren, through the generations. Government has no right to unilaterally confiscate such property for construction purposes.

The Council of Torah Sages joins in the outcry that has been voiced by numerous rabbinic authorities in Israel and across the globe in opposition to the planned construction. There is overwhelming international consensus among religious Jewry that this plan must not be allowed to come to fruition. We further understand that many secular entities and prominent humanitarians have also spoken out against the plan to desecrate the Shnipeshek cemetery, which they rightly see as an affront to human dignity.

Respectfully, but urgently, the Council of Torah Sages of America implores you to use your good offices to block the proposed construction on the site of the Shnipeshek cemetery.

Sincerely,

Moetzes Gedolei HaTorah b'America
Council of Torah Sages of America