



MIRRER YESHIVA CENTRAL INSTITUTE

מצ"ל • מיסודו של מרן הגאון רבי אברהם קאלמאנאוויץ זצ"ל • *Founded by Rabbi Avrohom Kalmanowitz* מצ"ל

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Bais Medrash • Post Graduate School • Kollel • Mesivta • Yeshiva K'tana • Sephardic Division

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December 15, 2020

Your excellency, President of the Republic of Lithuania, Honorable Gitanas Nauseda,
Honorable Prime Minister Ingrida Simonyte
Honorable Minister of Finance Gintare Skaiste

Respected members of the Coalition Budget Plans Review Team
Simonas Gentvilas, Marius Dubnikovas, Ausrine Armonaite, Kasparas Adommaitis,
Mykolas Majauskas

The Mirrer Yeshiva joins with thousands of American Jews that can trace their roots to the city of Vilna (now referred to as Vilnius) Lithuania. For many centuries, Vilna was home to a large and thriving community of religious Jewish scholars whose academic brilliance and personal piety were renowned world over. Indeed, some of the greatest rabbinical leaders of their day, whose works are still studied daily at the Mirrer Yeshiva and whose lives are revered even today, lived and died in Vilna, and were laid to their final rest there.

Jewish law and tradition attach inherent sanctity to all cemeteries and the human remains buried there. Our tradition views Jewish cemeteries as belonging to the Jewish nation as a whole. That is considered so while all Jewish cemeteries are sacred, that general rule applies with special force to the Snipisek Jewish Cemetery, which is holy and precious to Jews all across the world, because of the numerous holy and revered sages that are buried there. Indeed, there is a section of the cemetery that is so sacred, that no Jew ever dared to enter. It is believed that before the government closed the cemetery to burials in the early 1800's, more than 50,000 Jews were buried there.

The Holocaust wiped out the very community in whose care the preservation of the cemetery would have been entrusted. The decision of the Soviet regime to build the Sports Palace on the cemetery grounds not only desecrates the holy site, but also reflects a callous disregard for the tragic history of our community. Human rights and dignity do not end with one's death. The individuals buried in the Snipisek cemetery are the most helpless type of individuals, as they are unable to speak for themselves.

We respectfully request that all desecration, including the currently proposed construction, development and future use of this site be halted and a different location be used to house the Vilnius Congress Center. We therefore oppose the funding of the Vilnius Sports and Congress Building Complex Project in the 2021 – 2023 budget.



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We stand with the all the American Jewish Colleges who oppose this construction proposal quite vigorously. This is evident from the joint letter of opposition from 12 American Yeshiva Deans, including members of the prominent Feinstein, Kaminetsky, Kalmanowitz and Kotler rabbinic dynasties whose relatives are buried in this cemetery. In addition, over 50,000 people have signed the petition to move the

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convention center away from the old Jewish cemetery. While the 2009 agreement with the CPJCE was a welcome step in the right direction, it falls short of the reality and the facts concerning the depth of the existing foundation and the many layers of human remains which have been undisturbed until now. We therefore reject all past efforts. CPJCE is not an accepted representative of the American Lithuanian colleges or of those buried in the cemetery.

In particular, we respectfully request that the Ministry of Finance email to us a document in Lithuanian and a translation into English, which details the many arguments that were received against funding, which likewise details any arguments for funding, and which shows the analysis by which the Government of Lithuania ultimately arrived at its decision whether or not to include funding for this project in 2021. I would welcome your correspondence and your response. I can be emailed directly to phecht@thejnet.com.

Sincerely and respectfully,

Rabbi Pinchos Hecht
Executive Director