

18 May 2008

Statement by the Conference of the Lithuanian Jewish Community regarding recent increases in instances of antisemitism and xenophobia in Lithuania

The Conference of the Lithuanian Jewish Community (LJC) expresses its deep concern regarding the increase in instances of antisemitism and xenophobia aimed at Jews and other ethnic groups in Lithuania.

As loyal citizens of the Republic of Lithuania we have always supported Lithuania's independence and Euro-Atlantic integration processes. Thus, we feel the responsibility to remind Lithuania that antisemitism, discrimination and any other forms of intolerance hurt a country's reputation. The LJC considers it its duty to express the Community's opinions:

1. Lithuania's Jews are an inseparable part of Lithuania's civil society. As citizens of Lithuania, we believe that instances of antisemitism and xenophobia, and attempts to discriminate against citizens because of their ethnicity endanger not only Jews and other ethnic communities, but Lithuania's statehood as well.
2. The LJC, in keeping with its by-laws, defends and shall continue to defend, the rights of Jews, and will condemn any form of racism, xenophobia and antisemitism in Lithuania and beyond its borders. The LJC demands that the relevant State institutions prosecute those who propagate racial and ethnic hatred.
3. The LJC expresses its concern regarding the attempts to prosecute the well-known historian, Holocaust researcher, former brigadier general of the Israeli Defense Forces Yitzhak Arad. Attempts to accuse Y. Arad and other anti-fascist partisans of war crimes committed during World War II seem like the State attempting to revise Holocaust history. Especially troubling are the State's attempts to prosecute the participants in the anti-

Nazi struggle without demanding accountability from real war criminals, the Nazi collaborators.

4. The LJC believes that the attempts to inject discriminatory elements into the new draft Citizenship Law, elements that would guarantee inequality of citizens before the law, because of their ethnicity, violate the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania. The LJC states that the equating of restitution of property and citizenship goes against the principles of civilized democratic society.
5. The LJC is concerned by matters related to the restitution of Jewish community property, the conscious delaying of this process, and the unwillingness of certain government institutions to understand that restitution is an opportunity to at least partially restore historic justice. The members of the Lithuanian Jewish Community are concerned by the construction in the Snipiskes cemetery and the spread of untruthful statements regarding supposed Community demands on the territory of the cemetery. Unfortunately, all of this is being used by destructive forces who wish to increase anti-Semitic sentiment in Lithuania.
6. Seeing the obvious unwillingness of some politicians and civil servants to react suitably to openly anti-Jewish actions, the Community thanks all citizens and NGOs of our country that denounced the neo-nazi parade in March and other instances of racial and ethnic hatred.
7. From the beginning of next year Vilnius becomes the European Cultural Capital 2009. The Lithuanian Jewish Community supports this program and is ready to take part in the events of the national program *Vilnius – European Cultural Capital 2009* and is open for partnership. However, only defeat of antisemitism and xenophobia and reassurance of safety will allow us to believe that Vilnius has become a true European Cultural Capital, open to people of different nationalities and confessions.

STATEMENT ADOPTED ON 18 MAY 2008 IN VILNIUS, AT THE CONFERENCE OF THE LITHUANIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY, WHICH WAS ATTENDED BY THE DELEGATES OF 25 LITHUANIAN JEWISH ORGANIZATIONS.