

**ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA
MR. VALDAS ADAMKUS AT THE OPENING OF THE HOLOCAUST
HISTORY MUSEUM AT YAD VASHEM**

Your Excellency President Moshe Katsav,
Chairman Avner Shalev,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I deeply thank you for the privilege of taking part in this highly significant event. This new museum puts man face-to-face with conscience and with history.

The 20th century always will be also remembered for human sufferings and lost lives. No other nation has faced greater losses that befell the European Jewish communities. The Jews of Europe had fallen victim to the downfall of civilization and culture which had brought the Third Reich to barbaric racism.

In Lithuania, this tragedy of SHOA is alive in the museums, in the published testimonies of survivors of Vilnius and Kaunas ghettos and concentration camps, in school textbooks and the latest historians works leaving no blank spots in the history of the 20th century.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Personal belongings of the Holocaust victims - these silent reminders of once peaceful life, resting in the halls of this Memorial on the Mount of Remembrance - Har Hazichron -- in Jerusalem, deeply shock the heart and the mind.

As a Lithuanian I feel a heavy burden of history that in the first days of the war between the Nazis and the Soviets Lithuania became the place of most violent attacks against the Jews and bloodshed.

Regrettably, during those days we have failed to protect our own citizens Jews persecuted by the Nazis; we failed to stop a local Nazi collaborators, a number of volunteers among them, who readily served the terrible Nazi design, made use of the hopeless situation of their neighbors Jews, yielded to instigations, participated in killings and looted Jewish houses. It was about these collaborators that Dr. Elkhanan Elkes, the Head of the Judenrat in Kaunas ghetto, wrote to his children in 1943: "No one else but those who followed German orders destroyed entire communities"

Today, looking at the trees in the Garden of the Righteous Among the Nation with the names of Lithuanians who saved the Jews, it restores my hopes and belief in a mankind.

This belief guides us today in Lithuania as we open the Centers of Tolerance and Holocaust Education, send our school teachers to Yad Vashem, teach our young people about the Holocaust and tell them about the life of Jews in Lithuania before the war. We proceed with the restitution and return to Jewish organizations of religious buildings and Torahs scrolls. We work to preserve in Lithuania the Jewish heritage, and we hope our Old Town stands witness to our efforts.

The loss of once thriving Jewish communities in Lithuania has impoverished us all. This loss is also a warning to Europe and the global community. Let me assure that my country will resolutely fight against old and new anti-Semitism, treasuring the memory of hundreds of thousands of Lithuanian Jews brutally murdered by Nazis and local collaborators. We must act so that nobody would doubt our resolve. As a member of the European Union and NATO, Lithuania will support every effort to bring peace and security to the nations in the Middle East.

Your Excellency President Katsav,
Chairman Shalev,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

In May, in Lithuania we will commemorate the 60th anniversary of the victory of the anti-fascist coalition against Nazism. I am certain that this Day of Victory will also be the Day of Remembrance uniting Europe and the whole of the world.

Thank you.