

URGENT PETITION

FOR THE RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION OF THE HISTORIC JEWISH CEMETERY IN ŠNIPISKĖS

TO: Honorable Members of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania

I. PREAMBLE AND PETITIONER STANDING

As a direct descendant and namesake of the Vilna Gaon, preserving the integrity of the historic Šnipiškės Jewish Cemetery is a profound personal, moral, and historical imperative.

Having served as a named plaintiff alongside fellow verified descendants of those interred within these sacred grounds, and having worked closely with the late Rabbi Fried, of blessed memory, I urgently present this formal petition to request your principled leadership in protecting this invaluable monument of Lithuanian and Jewish cultural heritage.

We respectfully petition the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania to formally condemn and document the unlawful actions of the Soviet occupation regime, which forcibly dissolved the Vilnius Jewish Community, expropriated the sacred Šnipiškės Jewish Cemetery, and desecrated the burial grounds through the construction of the Soviet Sports Palace and auxiliary structures.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND RECORD OF DESECRATION

The historical and sacred significance of the Šnipiškės Jewish Cemetery is established by an extensive historical record:

- Origins and Early History:** Established in 1592 or 1593 (with historical references dating back to 1487), the Šnipiškės Jewish Cemetery served as the principal burial ground for the Jewish community of Vilnius until its formal closure in 1830 under Tsarist rule. Despite initial destruction, portions of the cemetery survived intact through the end of World War II.
- Soviet Expropriation and Closure (1948):** On October 15, 1948, the Executive Committee of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic adopted a resolution to officially close the old Jewish cemetery. At that time, the site encompassed just over three hectares—approximately one-quarter the area of the Užupis Jewish Cemetery on Olandų Street.

3. **Systematic Destruction (1955-1971):** Between 1955 and 1956, Soviet authorities initiated major destruction of graves to construct a public swimming pool in the center of the cemetery grounds. In 1971, the construction of the Palace of Sports resulted in the extensive destruction of the remaining above-ground monuments and gravestones.
 4. **Erasing Public Memory:** Soviet and Tsarist policies severely diminished public awareness regarding the exact boundaries of the cemetery, leading to decades of inadvertent desecration. Through the collaborative efforts of the City of Vilnius, the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, and the Lithuanian Jewish Community, informational signage has since been installed at the site.
 5. **Reinterment of Disturbed Remains (2003):** During the 2003 construction of the King Mindaugas Bridge and the reconstruction of Rinktinės and Olimpiečių Streets, the disturbed remains of approximately 700 individuals previously displaced by Soviet infrastructure projects were solemnly reinterred at the working Jewish Cemetery on Sudervės Road.
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III. FORMAL REQUESTS FOR LEGISLATIVE AND MUNICIPAL ACTION

In light of the historical evidence and international standards of human dignity and heritage preservation, the petitioners formally request that the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania enact the following measures:

1. **Mandate an Official Historical Investigation:** Direct the Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania to conduct a comprehensive historical investigation and issue a formal certification recognizing the state-sponsored destruction and desecration of the Šnipiškės Jewish Cemetery during the Soviet occupation.
2. **Grant Full Legal Protection and Landmark Status:** Require the Municipality of the City of Vilnius to grant full historical status and comprehensive legal protection to the Šnipiškės Jewish Cemetery, registering the entire site as a protected landmark in accordance with established legal precedents, such as that of the Užupis Jewish Cemetery.
3. **Correct the Historical Record:** Officially acknowledge that the grounds of Šnipiškės remain the resting place of thousands of revered individuals, and take active legislative and administrative steps to rectify long-standing historical inaccuracies regarding the scope, boundaries, and status of the cemetery.
4. **Prohibit Commercial Repurposing:** Reject all proposed legislation, adaptive reuse proposals, or commercial redevelopment initiatives seeking to repurpose or reactivate the former Soviet Sports Palace. Continued commercial or public

operation of structures erected atop sacred burial grounds directly violates international conventions on heritage preservation and human rights.

IV. INVITATION TO PARLIAMENTARY EXHIBITION

Members of the Seimas are cordially invited to attend a specialized historical exhibition:

- **Location:** Vitražo (Stained Glass) Gallery, Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania
- **Date & Time:** September 17, 2026 at 13:00

This exhibition will showcase primary historical evidence—including archival photographs, historical cartography, and legal documentation—demonstrating the undisputed boundaries and continuous sanctity of the Šnipiškės Jewish Cemetery.

V. CONCLUSION

We urge the Honorable Members of the Seimas to act decisively to preserve the sacred memory of those interred at Šnipiškės and uphold Lithuania's commitment to historical truth, justice, and cultural heritage.

Respectfully submitted,

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