



UNITED STATES COMMISSION
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICA'S HERITAGE ABROAD

January 29, 2021

Mr. Valdas Rakutis
Member of Parliament, The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania
Gedimino pr. 53, LT-01109
Vilnius, Lithuania

Dear MP Rakutis,

On behalf of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, I write to express my outrage and indignation at your comments on International Holocaust Remembrance Day. By blaming the Jewish people for perpetuating the Nazi regime's mass genocide, you are grossly distorting history and contributing to the dangerous rise of global anti-Semitism, putting millions of lives at risk.

Given your role as Chair of the Seimas' Commission on Historical Memory, these false and reckless comments are even more disturbing. Though these facts are known around the world, let me take this opportunity to correct the record: the Holocaust was a horrific human tragedy, during which six million Jews were mercilessly killed by the evil Nazi regime and their allies. Lithuania played a particularly harmful role in this moral atrocity, as more than 95 percent of the country's Jewish population was murdered during the German occupation. Scholars attribute this massive death rate to eager collaboration between Lithuania's non-Jewish population and the Nazi regime.

At the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, we have taken special care to preserve the heritage of Lithuanian Jewry, through protecting and preserving the Uzupis Jewish Cemetery and the Yurburg Jewish Cemetery. These two sites are some of the last remaining evidence of Lithuanian Jewry's former prominence. To look at this destruction and suggest that Jews are 'somewhat guilty' of their own slaughter is shameful and wrong.

The international community has joined together to condemn this destructive rhetoric. I echo the strong statements made by U.S. Ambassador Robert Gilchrist, Israeli Ambassador Yossi Levy and German Ambassador Matthias Sonnalso condemning your remarks. And I am pleased to see your colleagues in the Seimas, including party leader Gabrielius Landsbergis, distancing themselves from your comments and reaffirming the true historical record.

I urge you to fully retract your comments and apologize to the Jewish community, both in Lithuania and across the globe. Furthermore, I ask you to join me on one of the Commission's trips to Lithuania to learn more about the impact of Nazi brutality, and the consequences of dangerous, anti-Semitic rhetoric.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "P. Packer".

Paul Packer
Chairman, U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad