

# 38,000 Sign Petition to Save Old Jewish Cemetery in Vilnius, Lithuania

*Builders Plan to Convert Soviet-era Ruin into National Convention Center in Cemetery's Center*

VILNIUS, LITHUANIA, February 7, 2017 /EINPresswire.com/ -- A [petition](#) by Ruta Bloshtein, an Orthodox Jewish woman born and bred in Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, protesting current plans to site a new national convention center in the middle of the city's old Jewish cemetery, has garnered some 38,000 signatures from around the world, mostly from Litvaks (Jews of Lithuanian heritage).

It is the largest Litvak public affairs project since the Holocaust, when around 96% of Lithuanian Jews were annihilated.



Historic scene from the old Vilna Jewish cemetery before the war

The old cemetery, which dates to the 15th century, is still the burial place of thousands of Jews from Vilna (as the city is known historically), including many illustrious scholars from various centuries. The headstones and commemorative structures above ground were all stolen by the Soviet regime during its occupation of Lithuania. Stones keep turning up all around the city. The petition urges they be duly returned, and the cemetery restored as a matter of honor for modern democratic Lithuania.

“

Because of the Holocaust, these people who are buried here have no local descendants to take up their cause. This fate would never befall a major Christian cemetery here in the 21st century.”

*Ruta Bloshtein (Vilnius)*

The campaign for the cemetery's preservation is spearheaded by the online publication [Defending History](#), based in Vilnius, which has been chronicling the [international opposition](#) to the "convention center in the cemetery" project. The group firmly believes that the rights of the deceased of minorities to be left in peace is a universal human right, and one recognized by

the United States Congress in 2014 (see: <http://defendinghistory.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/PLAW-113publ154.pdf>) and at various points in time by the European Union.

Campaigners for the cemetery have expressed "deep disappointment" at the ongoing failure of the taxpayer funded "US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad" (USCPAHA) to speak out with moral clarity. The USCPAHA is linked to the State Department, and is alleged to have connections with groups that stand accused of offering "permissions" for building projects at East

European cemeteries in return for material considerations.

DefendingHistory.com's section on USCPAHA is at:

<http://defendinghistory.com/category/us-commission-for-preservation-of-the-heritage>.

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The Convention Center grand opening the petition hopes will never happen. By Vulovak for DefendingHistory.com

This press release can be viewed online at: <http://www.einpresswire.com>

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