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The Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe



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16th July 2015

Update on the Siauliai (Shavel) cemetery in Lithuania

THE 72 HOURS THAT SAVED THE MASS GRAVES IN SIAULIAI-LITHUANIA

On Monday 14th July 2015, the office of the CPJCE received an urgent call from the Jewish Community in Vilnius and its President Mrs. Faina Kukliansky about a very disturbing case concerning the discovery of a Mass Grave in Siauliai (known as the town of Shavel) which is about 270 kilometres from Vilnius nearer to the border with Latvia.

The discovery was made during construction work of a new road in the area, and Archaeologists have confirmed that there were mass graves in the area from many thousands of Holocaust victims, mainly prisoners who died in the area.

The office of the CPJCE immediately contacted their colleagues in Lithuania to establish the exact facts and it was confirmed that indeed this site is a mass grave from victims of the Holocaust.

Tuesday afternoon the 15th July the CPJCE dispatched one of its experts and he immediately travelled to Vilnius where he was met by members of the Jewish Community and together they travelled to the site and inspected the discovered Mass graves.

The local Authorities were extremely helpful and willing to listen to the Jewish representatives, it appeared that they were not at all aware of the Halachic requirements of the Jewish Community, but were very understanding and willing to help resolve this issue.

After the site visit, a meeting was held with the Mayor of Siauliai and representatives of the Government Interior and Culture departments and it was agreed that no excavations will take place and that the mass graves will be covered and protected undisturbed.

Further consultation will continue on how to protect the site during the nearby construction work.

The CPJCE expresses its sincere gratitude and appreciation to the Jewish Community in Vilnius, to the President Mrs. Faina Kukliansky, The Municipality of Siauliai, The Mayor of Siauliai, and all those involved in resolving this issue swiftly and in a short time.

A CPJCE spokesman said "This issue is a direct result of the recent meetings and special Commission set up by the Lithuanian Government and the Jewish Community in Lithuania and the CPJCE, where direct dialogue and co-operation has again proven to be crucial in saving the cemeteries and mass graves in Lithuania, and we hope that this collaboration will assist this Commission in its task of preserving and protecting Jewish Cemeteries and Mass Graves in Lithuania according to Jewish law and Tradition".