

110TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. CON. RES. 255

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

SEPTEMBER 26 (legislative day, SEPTEMBER 17), 2008

Received

OCTOBER 2 (legislative day, SEPTEMBER 17), 2008

Referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Expressing the sense of Congress regarding the United States commitment to preservation of religious and cultural sites and condemning instances where sites are desecrated.

Whereas the Congress is committed to protecting and preserving the cultural heritage of all national, religious, and ethnic groups, including sacred sites of such groups, including cemeteries in the United States and abroad;

Whereas the Holocaust annihilated much of Europe's Jewish population and in many countries, none were left

to care for the communal properties that represent a historic culture in the area and constitute an integral part of the Jewish religion;

Whereas the Holocaust and 45 years of atheistic, Communist governments created a critical need that led to the establishment of the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad;

Whereas the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad is tasked with identifying and reporting on cemeteries, monuments, and historic buildings in Eastern and Central Europe that are associated with the heritage of United States citizens and obtaining assurances from the governments of those regions that the properties will be protected and preserved;

Whereas the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad has in effect over 20 bilateral agreements between the United States and foreign governments assuring the protection and preservation of cultural property;

Whereas many properties continue to be endangered and many governments and communities continue to face fundamental and compelling challenges in the preservation of these properties;

Whereas Congress is outraged by the construction that occurred within the perceived boundaries of the historic Jewish cemetery located in the Snipiskes area of Vilnius, Lithuania;

Whereas cemeteries are sacred sites and are established to remain undisturbed in perpetuity, and the sanctity of a cemetery is determined by the bodies buried therein;

Whereas construction of a commercial building on the site disgraces the cemetery, it does not change its status;

Whereas experts within Lithuania and from around the world community believe that the cemetery located in the Snipiskes area of Vilnius, Lithuania, is a Jewish cemetery and is therefore sacred ground;

Whereas the Jewish cemetery located in the Snipiskes area of Vilnius, Lithuania, is known by scholars within Lithuania and from around the world as the first Jewish cemetery in Vilnius and dates back to the 15th century, and it is believed that before the government closed the cemetery in the early 1800s, more than 50,000 Jews were buried there;

Whereas the fact that the Government of Lithuania has allowed construction to take place within the perceived boundaries of the Jewish cemetery located in the Snipiskes area of Vilnius, Lithuania, and that desecration continues into the 21st century is an affront to the international Jewish community, the American people, and everyone who values religious freedom and ethnic diversity around the world;

Whereas the failure of the Government of Lithuania to protect the Jewish cemetery located in the Snipiskes area of Vilnius, Lithuania, violates the October 15, 2002, bilateral agreement between Lithuania and the United States on the protection and preservation of certain cultural properties, including cemeteries;

Whereas specifically, Article 1 of the bilateral agreement states: “[E]ach party will take appropriate steps to protect and preserve the cultural heritage of all national, religious, or ethnic groups that reside or resided in its ter-

ritory, including victims of genocide during the Second World War. The term ‘cultural heritage’ for purposes of this agreement means ‘. . . cemeteries, and memorials to the dead. . .’”; and

Whereas Congress welcomed the decision by the Government of Lithuania to conduct a geophysical survey of the Jewish cemetery located in the Snipiskes area of Vilnius, Lithuania, in the summer of 2008 to establish definitively the boundaries of the cemetery, as well as to designate the land as a cultural heritage site: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
 2 *concurring), That Congress—*

3 (1) expresses strong support for the work of the
 4 United States Commission for the Preservation of
 5 America’s Heritage Abroad and for the European
 6 countries that continue to work to preserve sacred
 7 historical sites, despite ongoing challenges;

8 (2) expresses strong sentiments to the Govern-
 9 ment of Lithuania that the people of the United
 10 States believe the Jewish cemetery located in the
 11 Snipiskes area of Vilnius, Lithuania, must not be
 12 desecrated;

13 (3) calls on the Government of Lithuania to
 14 give serious consideration to the recommendations
 15 being prepared by the international experts group on
 16 the basis of the geophysical survey of the Jewish
 17 cemetery located in the Snipiskes area of Vilnius,

1 Lithuania, and to take steps that guarantee the per-
2 manent preservation of the cemetery site, including
3 the possibility of placing the land under government
4 ownership; and

5 (4) declares that constructive bilateral relations
6 between Lithuania and the United States are impor-
7 tant to the governments, citizens, and shared agen-
8 das of both countries.

Passed the House of Representatives September 25,
2008.

Attest: LORRAINE C. MILLER,
Clerk.