



## **Pope Francis paid tribute to victims of the Holocaust in Lithuania at Vilnius ghetto site**

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2018 September 23 - Pope Francis, who is on a two-day visit to Lithuania, today stopped to pray in the territory of the capital city's historic Vilnius ghetto to pay tribute to the victims of the Holocaust in the Baltic country. Approximately 95 percent of Lithuania's Jews perished during the Holocaust.

Speaking earlier in the day in Kaunas at the Angelus prayer, the Holy Father referred to the thousands of Jews who were murdered here, saying: "As we read in the Book of Wisdom, the Jewish people suffered insults and cruel punishments. Let us think back on those times, and ask the Lord to give us the gift of discernment to detect in time any recrudescence of that pernicious attitude, any whiff of it that can taint the heart of generations that did not experience those times and can sometimes be taken in by such siren songs."

The Pope was joined by representatives of the Lithuanian Jewish Community in the Old Town of Vilnius, at a monument to those killed. Also present were Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė, Lithuanian Bishops' Conference President Archbishop Gintaras Grušas, and the chairwoman of the Lithuanian Jewish community Faina Kukliansky.

The gesture by Pope Francis coincides with the 75th anniversary of the liquidation of the Vilnius ghetto in 1943. Recalling that tragic event, the country observes September 23 as the Day of Remembrance of Lithuanian Jewish Victims of Genocide. For that reason, the state flag at the Presidential Palace is at half mast and the Lithuanian tricolor is displayed throughout the country with black mourning ribbons.

Germany invaded Lithuania in 1941 and mass killings of Jews by the Nazis commenced, with the involvement of local persons as well. Survivors were then forced into ghettos. More than 57,000 people entered the Vilna ghetto, but only 2,000 survived until the end of the war. As regards non-Jews who risked their lives during the Holocaust to save Jews from death, 893 Lithuanians are named on the Yad Vashem list of the Righteous Among the Nations.

From the 15th century until World War II, Lithuania was home to a large Jewish community which was a vibrant centre of Yiddish language, literature and culture. Statistics for 1941 put the country's total Jewish population at 208,000. It is a birthplace of many world-famous Litvaks, including politicians, artists and entrepreneurs. Today in Lithuania there are Jewish communities in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Šiauliai, Utena, Panevėžys, Ukmergė and Švenčionys, with about 90 surviving synagogues spread around the country.

*To read Pope Francis' Angelus meditation in Santakos Park in Kaunas, Lithuania, go here.*

Editorial remarks

Source: [Lithuanian Bishops' Conference](#).