

Yad Vashem boss denies war crimes

JC REPORTER

► ISRAEL HAS rejected a request from Lithuania's chief prosecutor to question Yitzhak Arad, the former director of the Israeli Holocaust Museum.

The prosecutor alleges that Dr Arad was involved in the killing of Lithuanian civilians as a partisan during the Second World War.

Dr Arad, who became a brigadier-general in the Israeli army and was the IDF's chief education officer, was due to visit Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital, to participate in the work of a government committee investigating Nazi and Soviet crimes in the country.

But an article in a right-wing magazine, *Republika*, raised question marks over Dr Arad's history with the partisans and the matter was taken up by the government's prosecutor.

Joseph Melamed, president of the Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel, said: "Until now they've not found even one Jew who would have killed defenceless Lithuanians. There

were no Jews like this. But in all the archives you will find the names of 23,000 Lithuanians who killed Jewish people."

Dr Arad gave testimony at the trials of Nazi war criminals. He believes he was targeted as part of a general Lithuanian policy against pro-Soviet World War Two troops.

He said: "What, as I understand, they are investigating now is actually the whole Soviet partisan movement."

He added that, as a Jewish teenager, "I saw as my obligation to fight those who were murderers of my people, those who were murderers of millions of other people."

"I saw it as my duty. I was proud of it. And, of course, I saw it also as a matter of survival."

Leading historians in Israel have suggested that the committee investigating Nazi and Soviet crimes was set up in order to appease Western calls for the country to deal with its Nazi past, in order to ease Lithuania's passage into the European Union.

COMMENT

Why the expert witness will not face scrutiny

BY EFRAIM ZUROFF



SEVERAL WEEKS ago, Israel received a request from Lithuania for judicial assistance which aroused the ire of the Israeli Justice Ministry. A Jewish Israeli citizen was suspected of committing war crimes and/or crimes against humanity during World War Two.

This was not the first request of its kind from the Lithuanians, who had previously accused two Jews living in Israel of carrying out severe crimes against Lithuanians in their capacity as Communist officers during or shortly after the war. Those requests were rejected by Israel on the grounds that Lithuanian officers of higher or equivalent rank in the same units were never even questioned, let alone prosecuted, for possible involvement in the supposed crimes.

But this time the suspect was none other than former Yad Vashem chairman and noted Holocaust scholar Dr Yitzhak Arad, who had fought with the Soviet partisans against Nazi soldiers and their Lithuanian collaborators.

Anyone acquainted with Lithuania's abysmal failure to punish local Holocaust perpetrators and the ceaseless efforts to minimise the role played by Lithuanians in Holocaust crimes can hardly have been surprised by the authorities' latest manoeuvre to relativise Lithuania's Holocaust guilt. What better way to demonstrate the "balance" between the misdeeds of Jews and Lithuanians than to press charges against Dr Arad, who has testified as an expert witness in the US and Canada about the role played by Lithuanian Nazi collaborators in the mass murder of Jews. His prosecution would go a long way to undermine the legitimacy of Jewish demands that Lithuania take legal measures against local Holocaust perpetrators.

In fact, Lithuania has failed to incarcerate a single Holocaust criminal for a single minute since it obtained inde-

pendence in 1991, despite the fact that more than a dozen Nazi collaborators who had escaped to the US after the war have returned to their homeland after being prosecuted by the American Office of Special Investigations for their failure to disclose their World War Two activities.

The irony of the Lithuanian efforts to prosecute Dr Arad is that, unlike other Holocaust scholars, he was willing to serve on the historical commission established by Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus to investigate the crimes of the Nazi and Communist occupations. Others had harshly criticised the false symmetry the combination would create between Holocaust and Communist crimes, and warned that such a commission would be used to minimise Lithuanian complicity in the Shoah. But the fear in Yad Vashem and the Foreign Ministry was that, without Jewish participation, there was no chance whatsoever of preventing such a dangerous result.

In response to the efforts to investigate Dr Arad, Yad Vashem has suspended its participation in the historical commission, as it should, but the truth is that in many respects the handwriting was on the wall. Having got away scot-free with protecting its Holocaust perpetrators, and having been rewarded for minimal progress in relatively innocuous issues such as Holocaust remembrance by support from Jewish organisations such as the American Jewish Committee for entry to Nato, Lithuania apparently believed that it could even prosecute Dr Arad.

It remains to be seen whether Israel and the Jewish world have learned their lesson. In post-communist Europe, where declarations of intentions to honour the victims and prosecute the guilty are all the rage, the time has come to judge countries not by their words, but by their actions. The investigation of Holocaust hero Yitzhak Arad is hopefully the wake-up call that will finally be heeded.

Dr Efraim Zuroff is director of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre in Jerusalem



Alarm: crowds gather in Golders Green Road as firemen attack the blaze from the roof

Blaze guts leading kosher restaurant

BY SIMON ROCKER AND DANA GLOGER

► ONE OF London's most popular kosher restaurants was ravaged by fire early on Monday evening.

Thirty-five fire-fighters in seven fire engines went to tackle the blaze which started at about 5.50pm at the Israeli-style restaurant Solly's, after receiving 21 emergency calls.

Half of the roof of the restaurant in Golders Green, North-West London, was alight. It took fire-fighters around an hour to put out the blaze.

Huge volumes of smoke also set off the fire alarm at the neighbouring Tesco Express store which was evacuated along with a nearby gym.

Fire-liaison officer Phil Butler said

that there were no casualties. "No one was injured as there were only staff in the restaurant at the time and they left the building."

One witness, a local businessman who did not wish to be named, said that he was in another restaurant when he spotted "a lot of smoke coming out of the roof of Solly's".

"Everyone in Solly's was oblivious. I ran in and told the guy at the counter 'there's a fire on top of you'. I asked if anyone was upstairs but no one was. It was full of smoke, you couldn't see more than a couple of metres ahead. It was quite scary."

Part of Golders Green Road had to be cordoned off following the fire, leaving traffic chaos in the area.

An employee of nearby bakery Car-

melli said: "The traffic was terrible. I couldn't recommend anyone to pass through Golders Green. You couldn't move."

She added: "Plenty of people came in to Carmelli to ask what's going on. No one was buying anything, though, everyone was just standing outside talking about it."

A woman working at Yarden grocers said: "There's terrible traffic on Golders Green Road at the best of times. But people couldn't get up or down the road. People were turning around and there were six buses backed up."

Gusts of white smoke were still visible from the roof of the restaurant two hours after the blaze. As the *JC* went to press, fire investigators were still examining the cause of the fire.

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