

Press Release

For Immediate Release
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“Students Protest on Yom Hashoah, demanding that Ukraine extradite the last two known Nazi War Criminals in NY”

On April 25th 2006 at 1:00 PM, hundreds of students from the Rambam Mesivta High School rallied outside the offices of the Ukrainian mission to the UN, demanding that Ukraine immediately extradite Jakiw Palij and Jaroslaw Bilaniuk, the last two Nazi War criminals living freely in New York. The protest was timed to coincide with Yom Hashoah-Holocaust Remembrance Day. “It’s not sufficient to merely remember and reflect upon the atrocities of the Holocaust, but we must feel a sense of moral outrage that compels us to bring these murderers to justice.” said Rabbi Zev Friedman, dean of Rambam.

Ukraine was notorious for its willing and active participation in the liquidation of tens of thousands of Jews. In Babi Yar alone, close to 35,000 Jews were shot to death in killing pits. Despite the active participation of thousands of Ukrainian Nazi collaborators during in the holocaust, the Ukraine has, to date, never put a single Nazi war criminal on trial. In fact, according to the Simon Wiesenthal center the Ukraine is notorious “for its total failure to address the issue of Holocaust perpetrators.”

Protestors called upon the Ukrainian government to demand **the immediate extradition** of Jaroslaw Bilaniuk and Jakiw Palij, the last two know Nazis living in New York City. **Both** were born in the Ukraine in 1923 in the town of Piadyki. **Both** served as an armed guard at the notorious Tranwiki Labor camp. **Both** Guarded prisoners held under inhumane conditions and prevented their escape. **Both** participated in an operation SS code named “Operation Harvest Festival” brutally SLAUGHTERING the entire inmate population of some 6,000 Jews on Nov 3, 1943. **Both** entered the US under false pretenses claiming that they were Farmers during the war.

“It’s time for the Ukrainians to face their past and aggressively pursue and punish the killers of their own citizens, who happened to be Jews” said student rally organizer Zoli Honig, a senior at Rambam. Members of Congress have also echoed this sentiment, and according to Congressman Joseph Crowley “it is time for these men who aided and participated in Nazi atrocities to be held accountable for their actions.”

“The Ukrainians have the moral responsibility to take immediate action in bringing these murderers to justice. Our Government has already initiated proceedings against these two, actually ordering Palij to be deported for his role in World War II atrocities. Why don’t the Ukrainians care as much as the United States does? Where is their sense of justice?” asked Rabbi Friedman.

RAMBAM MESIVTA

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In his remarks Rabbi Friedman implored the Ukrainian government to face their history of anti-Semitism. He recounted the hundreds of thousands of Jewish victims whose blood drenches the Ukrainian countryside. “Remember Babi Yar! Remember the Chmelnitzki massacres of 1648!” said Friedman. Referencing the fact that Chmelnitzki’s statue stands prominently in the Ukrainian capitol of Kiev, Rabbi Friedman wondered “How come this man is recognized as a national hero?”

Rabbi Yotav Eliach, principal of Rambam, emphasized that the purpose of the rally was to confront the Ukrainian government and urge them to do the right thing. “The Justice Department has found cause to deport these men. They are convinced that these men are war criminals. The only thing that remains is to extradite them and try them for their crimes”. Rabbi Eliach noted that “we are not looking for a show trial. We want the people of Ukraine and the world in general to be educated as to what occurred during the Holocaust so they can do their part to see that such horrors are never committed again.”

During the speeches students broke out in rhythmic chants making clear their demands of the Ukrainian government. “take them back”, “Do what’s right - extradite”, and “What do we want? Justice” echoed throughout the crowd. The rally hit its high point when a passerby stopped and asked to address the students. This man, a physician who immigrated from Kiev, was a survivor of Ukrainian anti-Semitism. His grandparents were slaughtered in Babi Yar. He applauded the students and urged them to press their case.

In keeping with the theme of Yom Hashoah, Rabbi Peretz Hochbaum, associate principal of Rambam underscored the significance of holding the rally on this day. “We are deeply moved by the events of the Holocaust and the memories of the souls whom we mourn today. But feeling bad is not enough. We are here today to turn our emotions into actions”, said Hochbaum. He then concluded his remarks by reciting the Yizkor prayer in memory of the 6 million Jews who perished in the Shoah.

The rally concluded with Rabbis Friedman and Eliach knocking on the door of the Ukrainian mission and asking for a meeting to express the importance of their cause. The rabbis were not admitted to the mission, but that did not deter them. “We will keep at it as long as it takes,” said Rabbi Friedman, “we will continue to press their government and we will take up the issue in Congress, as well.”

Rambam students have a long record of activism and involvement in public policy. These efforts, born out of the school’s philosophical commitment to “U’Biarta Hara Mikirbecha”- “you shall purge evil from your midst”, have led to demonstrations and rallies against Nazi war criminals, Saudi sponsored terror, French anti –-Semitism, human rights violations, and more. “Rambam students have been influential in shaping governmental policy toward Nazi criminals in the past, and we can do it again,” said Rabbi Eliach. In fact, in 2002, Rambam played a significant role in getting the governments of Latvia and Australia to cooperate in the extradition and trial of a Nazi war criminal, Konrad Kaleijs.