Rabbi Andrew Baker, Director

I made my first visit to Ponary in 1992. It is only a short drive from the center of Vilnius, a quiet spot with a memorial sculpture and a paved plaza. From the plaza pathways branch out to the concrete storage pits which became the mass graves of tens of thousands of Vilna Jews. They are now covered in grass and shaded by trees. A visitor quite simply cannot imagine the unspeakable horrors that took place here.

But Rachel Margolis knows. This is where she says Kaddish for her family. Her story is a tribute to the endurance and heroism of the very few who survived those darkest days. The stories of the Jewish Partisans who fought against enormous odds are rightly celebrated. Most who emerged from the forests left Lithuania for new homes in Israel or in America.

Yet Rachel Margolis never severed her own ties to that city. She helped establish the Green House, a small but compelling museum in Vilnius that tells the story of the Holocaust in Lithuania. She has guided visitors through the museum and through the paths of Ponary so that they will know what happened there.

Rachel Margolis has already found her place in Jewish history. But, even if it is not appreciated, she also makes her contribution to Lithuanian history. I very much hope that in time Lithuanian citizens will also recognize this fact.

Both personally and on behalf of the American Jewish Committee, we salute her on this day of honor to her and her work.

Sincerely,