

WASHINGTON, D.C. September 29, 2009



In Brief: Babi Yar Construction -- Update

Dear Friend,

In last week's update, I wrote about the decision to build a hotel on or near the Babi Yar memorial in Kyiv, Ukraine. As you may remember, I wrote that NCSJ and other national Jewish organizations had the opportunity to raise our concerns and objections to this idea directly with Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko in New York City during the opening of the United Nations General Assembly.

In addition, NCSJ had been working closely with the Ukrainian Embassy in Washington, D.C. to ensure that local Kyiv officials understood why this was a bad decision, and why it had to be changed.

President Yushchenko said he didn't believe that the construction would occur, and I am pleased to inform you that over the weekend the Kyiv Mayor announced that no building will take place on the site.

Sincerely,



Mark B. Levin
Executive Director

NCSJ WEEKLY SPECIAL NEWS UPDATE
Washington, D.C. September 29, 2009

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1. *Kiev scraps plan to build Babi Yar hotel*
By Maria Danilova
AP, September 28, 2009

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Kiev scraps plan to build Babi Yar hotel
By Maria Danilova
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KIEV, Ukraine — Kiev authorities have scrapped a widely criticized plan to build a hotel near what experts say was a killing field used by Nazis during the Babi Yar massacre, officials said Monday.

Mayor Leonid Chernovetsky's office said he vetoed a decision by the city council to build the hotel, which would have been called Babi Yar.

The decision to build a hotel there had been supported by members of the mayor's faction in the city council. They said Kiev, the Ukrainian capital, needed more hotels to host the 2012 European soccer championship and develop tourism after the event. They argued that the planned hotel would not touch any of the remains.

Marta Hrymska, a spokeswoman for Chernovetsky, said the hotel had been merely a tentative plan by city architects and it has been rejected.

"It was just a proposal," Hrymska said. "Nobody has allocated any land, there are no investors, no hotel is being built. We are not going to build anything."

The hotel would have been built in the middle of the main killing site, according to Vitaliy Nakhmanovich, a leading Ukrainian Babi Yar scholar.

Jewish groups condemned the plan harshly, saying it would show disrespect for the victims of one of the worst chapters of the Holocaust. More than 33,700 Jews were shot at Babi Yar over 48 hours beginning Sept. 29, 1941. In the ensuing months, the ravine was filled with an estimated 100,000 bodies, among them those of non-Jewish Kiev residents and Red Army prisoners of the Nazis.

The 68th anniversary of the massacre will be observed Tuesday.

Alexei Kuznetsov, the son of Soviet writer Anatoly Kuznetsov, who authored "Babi Yar," a book documenting the massacre, said the plan to build a hotel on the site showed Ukrainian authorities' reluctance to honor the tragedy after decades of silence under the Soviet rule.

The location went officially unmarked for many years under the anti-Semitic Soviet authorities, who didn't want to single out Babi Yar as a Jewish tragedy.

Kuznetsov called for building a government-sponsored memorial on the spot where several monuments to the tragedy are now located, but which are not yet linked into a comprehensive remembrance complex.

"It's that Soviet delayed-action mine that is exploding only now," Kuznetsov told The Associated Press. "If the Babi Yar tragedy hadn't been kept secret, ... there would be no talk about this (hotel) now."