

I am Andrius Kulikauskas of Vilnius Gediminas Technical University.

In celebrating 100 years since the birth of Lithuania's great humanist, Algirdas Julius Greimas, I will be asking your help to create a symbol of healing - a moment of silence - which we need very much in Lithuania.

As you walk the streets of Kaunas, you can imagine how before the war we Lithuanians, including Jews such as philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, enjoyed our independence. You can also imagine how, on these same streets, Soviet tanks occupied us in 1940, Nazi troops invaded in 1941, and Jews were led to death.

Greimas is a symbol of Lithuanian confusion. In 1940, he was a 23-year old who was sympathetic to the Soviet-installed People's government and even gave speeches praising Stalin and encouraging Lithuanians to vote to join the Soviet Union. In June of 1941, the Soviets arrested his father and deported his mother. That same month, Nazi Germany invaded. The Germany army put him in charge of 200 Lithuanian volunteers and then ordered him to assemble 100 Jews to sweep the streets. He handed down this order, but fortunately, freed himself of such duties the next day. But then he became the editor of an anti-Soviet newspaper which unfairly blamed Lithuania's Jews for Soviet atrocities and argued that they must be deported.

As a Lithuanian, I can say that it is not our fault that we were bullied by the Soviets and the Nazis, but it is our fault that we ourselves bullied Lithuania's Jews. If a world at war encouraged us to do the wrong thing, then I hope a world at peace will encourage us to do the right thing.

I ask us, the semioticians of the world, to apply our love of signs to encourage us to wish for and create a national symbol of empathy for Lithuania's Jews. The Soviets desecrated the oldest Jewish cemetery in Vilnius by building a Sports Palace on it, which is now in decay, and which could be removed to restore the cemetery as a symbol which would be visible from the Castle of Gediminas. Instead, the Lithuanian government is intent on using European Union money to convert the Sports Palace into a Convention Center for events such as this, where we would be enjoying ourselves while causing pain to many Jews and those who care about them.

As a symbol of healing for ourselves, for Algirdas Julius Greimas, and for Lithuania, I ask you now for a moment of silence to honor his mother and father, and all of the victims of the Soviets, of the Nazis, and of the Lithuanians, but especially, Lithuania's Jews.