



TARGUM SHLISHI

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September 2007

Elul 5767

Dear Friends and Colleagues:

In less than two years, from June 1941 until the spring of 1943, an estimated 1.25 million Jews were massacred in the Soviet Union by Nazi mobile killing units, or *Einsatzgruppen*. The Jewish populations of whole villages were slaughtered in mere hours; entire regions were annihilated in an afternoon. The victims were buried – many of them still alive – in mass graves. Very little is known about this terrible time because unlike the case in the concentration camps, there were few survivors to tell the world what happened. And in fact, the actual number of deaths may be much larger, and may have occurred over a longer time period (more recent estimates indicate 1.5 million Jews were murdered in the Ukraine).

Now, a priest in Paris has made it his mission to research this history, make the facts known, and locate the graves. His research is conducted on two fronts – archival research, primarily undertaken by graduate students, and frequent trips to the Ukraine where he interviews villagers who witnessed these events when they were children and teenagers.

Father Patrick Desbois and his team travel to the Ukraine every other month to interview villagers and locate graves. According to Father Desbois, many of the villagers have never before spoken of the massacres, but they respond to his status as a Catholic priest. When he began this endeavor, in 2004, 200 sites were known. He has identified an additional 500 sites, the largest of which had approximately 97,000 bodies. (By comparison, 35,000 murdered Jews were buried at Babi Yar.) Father Desbois estimates that there are 1,700 graves still to be located.

Father Desbois's deep sense of mission is motivated by a compulsion to locate these sites before all the witnesses have died, to in his words, "bring proof of these assassinations to the world." He views this work as essential to history, and is adamant that the world know the truth of what happened in these places. He estimates that it will take four more years to locate all the sites in the Ukraine, after which he hopes to move into Russia and the Baltics. He and his foundation, Yahad In Unum, are at work on a book, exhibitions (one of which is on view June 20-November 30, 2007 at the Memorial de la Shoah in Paris and that I viewed on a recent trip in July; shocking and moving), and a documentary film.

Clearly, this is important and urgent work. The witnesses are old and they are dying. They are the only ones who can tell of the horrific events that occurred in these villages. We are running out of time.

Yahad In Unum's work is constrained by the fact that it operates on a shoestring budget. It is funded in part by the Shoah Foundation in France and the functional budget is funded by the Catholic Church; all other funds must be raised. Additional funding is crucial to the continuation of the initiative and the realization of its goals. It is especially urgent because of the need to reach the victims before it's too late. Because of the importance of the work and its urgent nature, I decided to help raise funds for Father Desbois's efforts.



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Additional information about Father Desbois's work is included on our website – a 10-minute film on this remarkable work that we produced and that I urge you to watch, a list of Frequently Asked Questions, contribution information for those we've asked to contribute, an article from *Haaretz.com* (which is how I originally learned of Father Desbois's work), an article from the *Christian Science Monitor*, and an overview from Yahad In Unum. You can also visit Yahad In Unum's website: www.yahadinunum.org.

This is the first time I have ever spearheaded a fundraising effort and it is I who approached Father Desbois after reading of his work. I am doing so because I feel this work is so critically important. We owe it to the victims to tell their stories, to preserve these events for history. It seems a travesty that in sixty-plus years, no Jewish organization has undertaken this work.

My foundation, Targum Shlishi, donated \$50,000 to this effort. I invite you to join me in this important effort by raising funds from your friends and colleagues for this cause. All donations are tax deductible. I will, at your request, provide you with additional kits for forwarding to potential donors.

Why support this effort? If we don't, who will? This is not a project for those seeking a Federation Man of the Year dinner – rather, it's for those who feel deeply, who abhor the pain, indignity, and horror of these events, and who understand the crucial importance of recovering and preserving history as a legacy for future generations. We are the only ones who can ensure that the truth of what happened in these villages is told – in ten years it will be too late to do this work. Time is running out.

All donations are tax deductible and checks are made out to and distributed through the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, which has agreed to collect and distribute the donations and whose Paris office is regularly in contact with Father Desbois.

We have made the decision to limit contributions to those individuals we and our colleagues contact. However, this Targum Shlishi initiative is about much more than simply raising funds. We very much hope that our efforts to make people aware of Father Desbois's work will serve to raise awareness of this horrific time in history.

I welcome your questions.

Sincerely,

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