

Yom Hashoah – 20 April 2009

**Message of Father Patrick Desbois
President of Yahad in Unum**

For the past five years, Yahad in Unum, meaning together in Hebrew and Latin respectively, has been travelling to Belarus and Ukraine to search for mass graves of Jews and Gypsies that were shot between 1941-1944 by units of the Third Reich.

The Ukrainian and Belarusian neighbors of the murdered Jews want to share their story before they die.

They were ordered by the Nazis to dig the pits, early in the morning, to transport the Jews of the village to the graves in caravans, by horse, and to cover the graves even if the Jews were only wounded.

Yahad in Unum has discovered over 850 extermination sites, the majority previously unknown, and has established ballistic proof, archival evidence, and oral histories, that show without any doubt that the women, children, and the elderly were shot in the Ukraine and Belarus only because they were Jewish. At Bodgdanivka, the mass grave contains the remains of over 42,000 Jews.

More than two million Jews were slaughtered like animals and buried like animals in pits, behind churches and in parks.

It was the Shoah by bullets.

In Eastern Europe the truth of the Shoah lies in the conscience of the poor.

A week ago I was in Belarus with my team.

Ivan, 78 years old, recounted:

Each time that the Nazis murdered Jewish families in the Brest Ghetto, we, the Soviet Prisoners, were forced to pack their belongings in large wooden boxes so that they could be sold at auction on the market. In each box we had to put one pair of shoes, one dress, jewelry, and then we closed the box. After the total liquidation of the Ghetto, several trucks had to be brought to deliver the boxes of belongings to the town market.

The poor people of the East now want us to now that the continent was transformed into a continent of murder.

Hannah, trembling, eyes lowered, mumbles:

I was forced to walk on the bodies of murdered Jews after each round of firing to create more space in the Pit. My class of Jewish girls arrived. They were shot. I had to walk on them like the others.

We have found more than 900 Ukrainian or Belarusian witnesses that were present while Jews were shot.

Why does Yahad in Unum spend so much energy on uncovering the mass graves of those Jews murdered by bullets in the Shoah?

First of all, to restore their dignity and so that the Kaddish prayer can finally be recited for them.

They were killed like animals and buried like beasts.

Today, all too often, scavengers uncover the graves searching for dental gold.

But also because today on our planet there are individuals and groups who propagate that the Shoah didn't occur, that it was a lie made up to justify the creation of the State of Israel.

Holocaust denial is not an intellectual position. There is no Holocaust denial without anti-Semitism. The denier wants to take away, in the worst possible way, the legitimacy of the Jewish people.

Some deniers call themselves Catholics; others are the President of Iran – but they are all the same. Denial is a testament from Himmler and Heidrich who in July 1942 decided to exhume and burn the bodies of murdered Jews in the secret operation known as 1005.

Operation 1005 was the mother of Holocaust denial.

Do not forget! The first denial was the denial of the inferno.

Yahad in Unum does not work for tomorrow, but for the day after when few survivors will be among us.

We work so that the world will know that there were men and women that wanted to build a world while eradicating the people of the G-d of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Shoah was the fruit of anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism is a sin against G-d and against humanity, said Pope John Paul III.

Unfortunately a sin never dies.

Many hope that our voices will fall silent.

We will not be silenced, because of the blood of Olga, 4 years old and shot at Simferopol, of Itzik, 7 years old and shot at Busk, of Edik, 16 years old and shott at Tarnopil, because the blood of Abel, murdered by Cain, never stopped wailing towards the sky.

We will not, we can not, condemn those children murdered during the Shoah to silence.
We will not, we can not, build a modern world on top of the thousands of unknown mass graves of murdered Jews.

We will not, we can not, build a world by asking Abel to be quiet.

Translated from French by David Nachfolger