

# Bonner Querschnitte

## Bonn Profiles – Press Reports

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### BQ 874 – No. 54/2025

## President and Secretary General of ISHR visit the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights in Vilnius

### Thomas Schirmmacher commemorates the murdered Jews, and a murdered bishop from Lithuania

(Bonn, 12.09.2025) The president and the secretary general of the International Society for Human Rights (ISHR), along with colleagues from ISHR Lithuania, Caritas Vilnius, and some Jewish friends from the United States, visited the Museum of Occupations and Freedom Struggles in Vilnius. Housed in the former KGB headquarters, the museum chronicles Lithuania's struggles during the Soviet occupations (1940–1941 and 1944–1991) and, to a lesser extent, the Nazi occupation (1941–1944). The building has a grim history of oppression under the Soviet and Nazi regimes. Established in 1992, the museum serves as a memorial to the victims of repression and as a testament to Lithuanian resilience. The basement contains 19 original KGB prison cells, including solitary confinement cells, interrogation rooms, and a padded, soundproof cell used to muffle screams during torture. Some cells are so small that prisoners could not fully extend their arms. Others feature cruel conditions, such as an ice-water cell where prisoners stood on a tiny platform to avoid the freezing water.

A particularly chilling exhibit is the execution chamber, where over 1,000 prisoners, about one-third of whom resisted the Soviet occupation, were killed between 1944 and the 1960s. A glass floor displays artifacts recovered from mass graves, such as buttons, glasses, and bones. A reenacted video shows the execution process: prisoners were shot in the head, and their

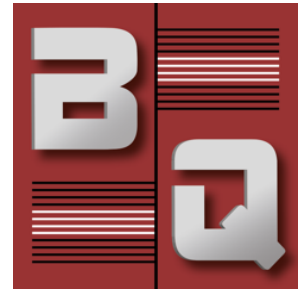


Thomas Schirmmacher at the KGB Museum in Vilnius in commemoration of the murdered Jews © ISHR/Matthias Böhning

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bodies were swiftly removed. The building itself is a symbol of oppression. It served as a courthouse under Tsarist Russia, a Gestapo headquarters during the Nazi occupation, and the KGB's base for nearly 50 years, until 1991. It was the site of mass arrests, interrogations, torture, and executions, and bodies were often buried in mass graves. The establishment of the museum reflects Lithuania's commitment to confronting its past and honoring those who fought for freedom.



Thomas Schirmacher commemorates a murdered bishop in the KGB Museum in Vilnius © ISHR/Matthias Böhning

Established in 1992, the museum was initially known as the *Museum of Genocide Victims* until 2018. It was also commonly referred to as the *KGB Museum*. However, as the oppression of Lithuanians from 1940 to 1941 and from 1944 to 1991 by the Soviet Empire was rarely considered genocide, and as the museum did not address the genocide of Jews during the German occupation from 1941 to 1944, the name was harshly criticized globally. In 2018, the name was finally changed to the *Museum of Occupations and Freedom Fights*, and a room was added to address the genocide of Jews.

The entire delegation visited the former Jewish ghetto in Vilnius and other sites of Jewish history throughout the country. During their stay in Vilnius, they learned about the status of the Lithuanian section of the ISHR's cooperation with Caritas Lithuania, the ISHR's main implementation partner in Lithuania. They visited various locations where joint projects supporting refugees from Belarus and Ukraine are carried out and spoke with numerous project staff members.



Thomas Schirmacher in the interrogation cell of the KGB Museum in Vilnius © ISHR/Matthias Böhning

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- **Photo 1:** Thomas Schirmmacher at the KGB Museum in Vilnius in commemoration of the murdered Jews © ISHR/Matthias Böhning
- **Photo 2 and photo 3:** Thomas Schirmmacher commemorates a murdered bishop in the KGB Museum in Vilnius © ISHR/Matthias Böhning
- **Photo 4:** Thomas Schirmmacher in the interrogation cell of the KGB Museum in Vilnius © ISHR/Matthias Böhning
- **Photo 5:** With Lithuanian ISHR Director Jurgita Samoskiene in Vilnius 2025 © ISHR/Matthias Böhning
- **Photo 6:** Thomas Schirmmacher – Selfie in Vilnius © ISHR/Matthias Böhning

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