

Press Release:

From the Organizing Committee of the 70th Anniversary Commemoration of Zmievskaia Balka – “Russia’s Babi Yar”

15 February 2012

Dear Friends: Please disseminate the following press release by the committee organizing the 70th Anniversary Commemoration of Zmievskaia Balka – “Russia’s Babi Yar.” Scheduled events will commemorate a series of mass executions by Nazis just outside the city of Rostov, Russia between 1942 and 1943. While grassroots commemorative initiatives have taken place since the early 1990s by Rostov’s small Jewish community, 2012 marks the first major effort to commemorate the Holocaust in Rostov publicly.

The planning process takes place amidst conflict over the recent decision by Rostov government officials to take down a memorial plaque that was erected in 2004, identifying most of the 27,000 Zmievskaia Balka victims as Jewish. The replacement plaque does not mention Jews, but rather the “peaceful citizens of Rostov-on-Don and Soviet prisoners-of-war.” Having struggled for decades to battle exclusionary nationalism and anti-Semitism in the construction of public memory of the events at Zmievskaia Balka, Rostov’s Jewish community and the diaspora it has yielded have been spurred to action and are seeking support as well as information, donations of artifacts and broad participation in the commemorative activities.

70th Anniversary Commemoration of Zmievskaia Balka – “Russia’s Babi Yar”

Rostov on Don, Russia, August 12-14, 2012

Organizing Committee Announcement

August 2012 marks the 70th anniversary of the beginning of mass executions of Jews by the Nazis in Rostov on Don, Russia, in the Zmievskaia “balka” - a huge ravine on the edge of this southern Russian city of over one million residents. Here more than 20,000 people were killed. The greatest number of victims, including poisoned children, died on August 11 and 12, 1942. For Russia, this place holds the symbolic importance of Ukraine’s Babi Yar. There is no place in Russia where a greater number of Holocaust victims lost their lives. Others were also killed here: Soviet citizens of other nationalities, prisoners of war, resisters, psychiatric hospital patients, and others.

In 1975, a memorial was erected at the Rostov "Zmievskaia Balka" and a small museum was built there.

This anniversary of the Rostov tragedy, dedicated to the memory of the victims, deserves attention on an international level, as this place has relevance for many famous people connected with the history of the Holocaust. Among those executed here was world-renowned psychoanalyst Sabina Spielrein (about whom several feature films have been made). Both before and after the war Alexander Pechersky lived in Rostov. Pechersky was the organizer of the only successful mass escape from a Nazi death camp -- the escape from Sobibor. A British film about his exploits was well received.

Two other prominent Jewish leaders are connected to Rostov: Fedor Mikhalchenko, rescued in Buchenwald as a child and later to become Chief Rabbi of Israel, and Meir Lau, present day chairman of the Board of the museum "Yad Vashem." Meir Lau, who is planning to attend the remembrance events, will be one of the honored guests. Government delegations, including the U.S. and Israel, are being invited.

Please note that August 11, 2012 falls on a Saturday, which means that no memorial services will be held on this day.

August 12-14, 2012

Planned memorial /educational activities in Rostov-on-Don include the following:

- A memorial evening in one of the city's largest halls on August 12th ;
- A ceremony at the Zmievskaia Balka on the morning of 13th August;
- Opening of a new exhibit at the Museum of the "Zmievskaia Balka" (August 13);
- International conference in memory of Sabina Spielrein on the "Fate of Scientists during the Holocaust" (August 12th -13th);
- A seminar for teachers of Russia, CIS and the Rostov Region, "Lessons of the Holocaust - the path to tolerance" (12th -14th August);
- A Holocaust Film Festival to feature both documentary and feature films;

We are seeking support from colleagues and interested parties across the globe.

How You Can Help:

- Join the organizing committee.
- Donate money to help us hire organizers and researchers.
- If you have any information about the victims of Zmievskaia Balka or their relatives or descendants, please contact us.
- Do you read Russian? When searching for the names of the dead, we found the miraculously-preserved records of the Rostov synagogue circa 1850-1921. Please help us translate these records, as well as other research articles on the events at Rostov, from Russian into English so that they may be more widely disseminated.
- Contribute to memorial books or consider donating to the exhibit.
- Spread the word: disseminate this press release widely.

Please contact us for more information.

Contact: Yuri Dombrovskiy: +79037553043, yuri.domb@gmail.com

Web links:

<http://holocaust.su>

<http://www.rememberingrostov.com/>