

Vilnius, 26th February: A Lithuanian prosecutor in charge of genocide trials has criticized sharply the new initiative by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre to put three Lithuanians on trial on charges of Nazi collaboration, saying that the case was hopeless.

Commenting on a statement made by a representative of the Wiesenthal Centre, the chief prosecutor for special investigations at the Prosecutor General's Office, Rimvydas Valentukevicius, said that "these statements are ridiculous".

On Thursday [26th February], Efraim Zuroff, director of the Nazi-hunting Simon Wiesenthal Centre's Jerusalem office, urged Lithuania to either demand extradition of its three citizens suspected of war crimes currently living in the West or to try them in absentia.

Zuroff also presented the Lithuanian embassy in Tel Aviv with documents about the three suspects: Antanas Gudelis, now living in Adelaide, Australia; Antanas Gecas-Gecevicius, residing in Edinburgh, Great Britain; and Kazys Ciurinskas, living in Crown Point, Indiana, the United States. According to information available to the Wiesenthal Centre, all the three Lithuanians had served in Lithuanian police battalions, "which took an active part in victimization and massacre of scores of Lithuanian Jews" during the Nazi rule.

The Lithuanian embassy in Israel will forward the documents to Lithuania without delay. Valentukevicius told BNS he was expecting the documents and would analyse them thoroughly, although he voiced doubts whether the documents would contain any new information. "I doubt that they could contain anything new, because all the information has been collected from Lithuanian archives," Valentukevicius said. He said Lithuanian prosecutors were in possession of archive documents regarding the three Lithuanians referred to by the Wiesenthal Centre. However, the documents contained no information about any criminal actions committed by them.

"Lithuanian law enforcement bodies cannot resort to presumptions - we need specific evidence, names of victims, and there is none," the prosecutor said. If the Lithuanian prosecution finds enough evidence to institute criminal proceedings against the above persons, they will open an inquiry and start collecting evidence which would make it possible to bring charges against them.