**14th Annual JRI Conference, Dinner and Commemoration Summary**

**by James Yarker, JRI Director**

**27 April 2015**

The Jasenovac Research Institute organized the

14th Annual Days of Jasenovac commemoration

activities on the weekend of April 25th and 26th,

2015 in New York City.  Since initiating these annual

activities to commemorate the breakout of Jasenovac

camp inmates, the JRI has always held a ceremony at

the New York Holocaust Memorial Park in Sheepshead

Bay, Brooklyn, with speakers offering their reflections

on the lessons of Jasenovac and paying tribute to the

victims.  The JRI established a monument to Jasenovac victims in the park, the sole such monument outside the territory of the former Yugoslavia.

This year was no exception and the speakers at the

April 25th memorial service included Raphael Israeli of Jerusalem, Jovan Mirkovic of Belgrade, Aneta Lalic of Zagreb, and JRI Directors Darko Trifunovic, Barry

Lituchy, Joy Jangdhari and John Ranz. A special

tribute was made to John Ranz, a founder of JRI,

who at 94 may have made his last public appearance.

John Ranz spoke briefly and was warmly greeted.

Father Djokan Majstorovic gave a religious service

and seven candles were lit for special groups of

victims at Jasenovac. Additional candles were lit for

individual family members. About 30 people attended this year's commemoration at the park.

Additionally, the JRI marked the anniversary of

Jasenovac's self-liberation - the 70th anniversary -

with an important conference at the Hotel Pennsylvania

in Manhattan on April 26th.  The theme of the conference

was "Looking Backward, Looking Forward."  As the ranks

of direct survivors of Jasenovac and the Ustashe genocide diminish, while the need to understand the tragedy and lessons of Jasenovac endures, the 70th anniversary was the occasion to gather people from different generations and disciplines in order to review some of  the work accomplished in research and activism, and to exchange about priorities and challenges in the work that lies ahead, whether it be defending the memory of fascism's victims in the Balkans or fighting the renascent fascist movements there.

The conference drew well over a hundred participants and was moderated by JRI founder and CEO Barry Lituchy.

In his opening remarks to the conference Lituchy underlined the essential nature of Holocaust education in the struggle against all forms of racism, especially anti-Semitism, anti-Serbianism, and anti-Romaism. Lituchy read the greetings

to the conference and message of support from H.E.

Mladen Ivanic, President of Bosnia.  Ms. Mirjana Zivkovic,

the Consul General of Serbia gave her personal

greetings to the conference and expressed her solidarity

with the JRI's work. Barry Lituchy introduced and thanked

Father Djokan Majstorovic for his steadfast support of

the JRI and his commitment to remembering all of the

victims of the Holocaust. Father Djokan and St. Sava's has

been a longtime co-sponsor of JRI's commemorations.

The conference featured a talk by Dr. Rene David

Alkalay, a Director of JRI, whose father and numerous

other relatives were murdered in Jasenovac, and who was himself incarcerated as a young child in camps operated by Italian fascist forces.  Eva Deutsch Costabel , who was also imprisoned in the fascist Italian camp system and who lost family members to Ustashe terror, spoke to the gathering

and donated one of her paintings for an auction which was

sold to one of the attendees for $500 which went to JRI.    
Several historians addressed the conference.  Raphael

Israeli of Jerusalem University, author of The Death

Camps of Croatia, spoke of the persistence of

controversy over the NDH period and of Jadovno as

an example of what he considers even more

concentrated terror than of Jasenovac.

Noted historian Jovan Mirkovic from Belgrade

conducted a remarkable audio-visual presentation

of Ustashe terror. Prof. Robert McCormick, of the

University of South Carolina, author of Croatia Under

Ante Pavelic, asked and answered the question of why

Ante Pavelic escaped punishment by describing the

cynical policy of US and British policy in relation to

Ustashe war crimes.

The JRI helps to promote the publication of new

scholarship about Jasenovac and the Holocaust in Yugoslavia, and the appearance of new books by these

three historians represents a major step forward in

scholarly attention to the subject, a situation quite

different from even ten years ago. It reflects an

opening up of world attention to this subject not seen

before, and is in fact a partial result of the work of JRI

over the past two decades.

Nenad Fogel, President of the Jewish Community of

Zemun, related the fate of Zemun's Jews in the NDH.

Aneta Lalic of the Serbian National Council in Zagreb explained how a climate of official toleration of holocaust revisionism and fascist vandalism and violence threatens Croatia's Serb minority, who perceive themselves as living,

not so much in a "postwar" era, but rather as living "between wars," with a new wave of persecution and conflict looming.

Barry Lituchy followed by reading a statement from Julia

Kos of the Zagreb Jewish Community, condemning

the shameful distortions and omissions at the Croatian

government run museum at Jasenovac at which she

once worked and for which she is now persecuted.

The treatment of Roma both in Ustashe Croatia and in present-day eastern Europe was the subject of important Roma speakers at the conference.  Dr. Petra Gelbart of the Voice of Roma described the execrable treatment of Roma in the present-day Czech republic and other places, and awed the gathering with her rendition of a portion of a Roma song.  Roma poet and educator from Kosovo Ragip Jasharaj spoke of the destruction of the Roma in Kosovo.

JRI Director Darko Trifunovic, an expert on terrorism and security issues, recounted the scandalous undermining by Muslim authorities of investigations into killings of Roma.  He also spoke briefly about the Bosnian connection to Salafist terrorism and its antecedents in the Handjar movement of WWII. Unfortunately, due to the length of the program and

the need for audience questions and discussion, he was only

able to give a synopsis of his report. His presentation along with the others will be published later this year as a book by

JRI.

There was a lively and wide ranging discussion involving audience members and presenters during

two discussion periods. JRI Directors Dr. Norman

Markowitz and Milan Lucic made important interventions.

JRI Directors Dr. Angelo D'Angelo and James Yarker

were also in attendance. Barry Lituchy thanked JRI

Director Joy Jangdhari for her enormous work in

organizing much of the conference. JRI Director Louis

Duit also played an important role and took the still photography for the event.

The event marked an important new stage in the JRI's

work setting new records for attendance and donations collected. The conference made an important contribution

to public awareness and scholarly discussion of the Holocaust in Yugoslavia and will be made available to a larger audience after the book is published and videos of the conference

by Milan Lucic and Joe Friendly are made available

on public television and youtube.