

## Latvia unveils Holocaust memorial



The memorial acknowledges Latvia's role in the massacre

A memorial has been unveiled in Latvia in memory of 25,000 Jews murdered by German Nazis and Latvian police during World War II.

The monument is the first of its kind in the country to acknowledge the involvement of the local population in the massacre, in a forest near the capital Riga in 1941.

Latvian President Vaira Vike-Freiberga said it was "a day of mourning for all of Latvia because this crime happened on our soil and our people took part in it".

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”

Most of the killers came from the local Latvian police force and Latvian guards from Riga's Jewish ghetto.

**Vaira Vike-  
Freiberga, Latvian  
president**

### 'Black day'

Speaking at the unveiling ceremony at Rumbula forest, Ms Vike-Freiberga said: "It is a sad and black day in the history of Latvia, one about which we wish to tell our people and our children.

"I wish such crimes never to be repeated," she said.

Some 77,000 Jews from Latvia, and another 30,000 to 40,000 sent by cattle truck from across Europe, were murdered in Latvia as part of Hitler's programme to exterminate European Jewry.

The massacre in Rumbula forest took place in November and December, 1941.

The victims are said to have been shot at a rate of 1,000 per hour, falling on top of those who had died before. Most of them came from Riga's Jewish ghetto.



"We remember the suffering of the innocent victims who were murdered here, and we bow our heads in respect," Ms Vike-Freiberga said.

Until recently, the Latvian authorities avoided acknowledging the atrocities that took place during the war, especially the role played by local collaborators.

### Names honoured

At the ceremony, members of the country's small Jewish community expressed satisfaction that the involvement of Latvians in the killings was mentioned on the memorial.

"It's very impressive," said Joseph, a 93-year-old whose father and two sisters died in the forest.

The memorial, funded by donations from Germany, Israel, Latvia and the US, lies seven kilometres (five miles) from the former ghetto, where the victims were rounded up.

It features the sacred Jewish menorah - a giant candelabrum with seven branches - surrounded by miniature obelisks bearing the names of 1,300 of the victims.

Of the other victims, the leader of Riga's Jewish community Arkady Sukharenko said: "We will search for them and engrave them."

Of Latvia's 95,000 pre-war Jewish population, barely 4,000 survived the Holocaust.



Vike-Freiberga said the killings should never be forgotten