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FOR THE PRESERVATION OF AMERICA'S HERITAGE ABROAD
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NEWS RELEASE

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U.S. and Estonia Sign Agreement to Preserve Cultural Properties

Representatives of the United States and the Republic of Estonia today signed an agreement regarding the preservation of places of worship, historic sites, monuments, cemeteries, and cultural archives.

Signing the agreement in Estonia's capital, Tallinn, were the Chairman of the U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, Warren L. Miller, and Estonia's Culture Minister, Margus Allikmaa.

The agreement pledges the countries to:

- Ensure equal treatment of all cultural groups -- including victims of genocide during World War II -- in property preservation and access policies;
- Establish a Joint Cultural Heritage Commission for bilateral efforts on the issue;
- Help protect and preserve properties that are important to the cultural heritage of their citizens; and
- Cooperate on cultural property identification and preservation efforts.

The agreement places a focus on communal properties of groups that are no longer able to protect and preserve significant properties without assistance. Its implementation is expected to focus on Jewish communal properties and Holocaust sites in Estonia.

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After signing the agreement, Miller called for memorial markers to be placed at 18 unmarked labor camp, execution, and mass grave sites. He also suggested the restoration of several untended Jewish cemeteries in Estonia. Burial places are sacred in the Jewish religion.

Miller additionally told Estonian officials that the U.S. Government would fund a comprehensive inventory of Jewish communal properties and Holocaust sites in Estonia. He also met today with the Chair of the Jewish Community in Estonia, Cilja Laud, regarding the survey and cultural property preservation needs in the country.

The Bush Administration official is scheduled to discuss these matters in separate meetings tomorrow with Estonia's Prime Minister, Siim Kallas, and Foreign Affairs Minister, Kristiina Ojuland.

Today's agreement is the twelfth such agreement to be entered into between the U.S. and countries in eastern and central Europe. The U.S. is seeking agreements with 22 countries in the region.

The U.S. Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad is charged by law with identifying sites in Eastern and Central Europe that are associated with the heritage of U.S. citizens and obtaining assurances from the region's governments that the properties will be preserved. It also assists privately-funded site restoration efforts. Its agreements are negotiated in cooperation with the U.S. Department of State.