

Germany awards in Vilnius former red guerrilla featured in mass murder case

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VILNIUS, Oct 29, BNS - Former Soviet guerrilla Fania Brancovskaya, 87, on Wednesday received a cross for merits in the German Embassy in Lithuania.

Lithuania holds the group Brancovskaya was once part of responsible for crimes against humanity - the awarded woman's comrades killed 46 civilians, 22 of whom were children, in Salcininkai, the vicinities of Vilnius, and burned down a village, delfi.lt reported on Wednesday.

Head of the Seimas group for inter-parliamentary relations with Germany Kestutis Masiulis of the Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats said this award comes as an insult and humiliates the Lithuanian people.

Brancovskaya was awarded for special merits in reconciling the German and Jewish people in Central and Eastern Europe, the German Embassy said in a statement.

German President Horst Koehler was the one to assign the award, conferred by German Ambassador to Lithuania Hans-Peter Annen.

Brancovskaya was a member of one of the three red guerilla gangs to execute on Jan. 29 of 1944 a massacre against Lithuanian civilians in the Salcininkai district, killing 46 civilian Poles - 22 children and 24 adults and injuring a number more in the Kaniukai village. According to historians, the village was then attacked by around 120-150 Soviet guerrillas.

The massacre case is under investigation with the Lithuanian Prosecutor General.

Brankovskaja's name is mentioned among other guerrillas suspected of partaking in the massacre in a press publication and conclusions of a historian's probe into the event.

Lithuanian prosecutors last year outraged US and Israeli Jews over their bid to interrogate Brancovskaya and other individuals related to the case,

Brancovskaya herself had told foreign press that she didn't partake in the destruction of Kaniukai village, and joined the guerrillas not out of a desire to kill but of one for her own survival, noting that their resistance was not against the local people, but the authorities. She joined the red guerrillas at the age of 20, when she was still living in the Jewish ghetto.

Even though the woman considered the possibility of moving to Israel, she stayed in Vilnius, Lithuania with her family. She has two children, six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren. She works as a librarian for the Vilnius University-based Yiddish Institute.