Joint Statement by the President of the Republic of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė and the President of the State of Israel Reuven (Ruvi) Rivlin on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relationship between the two countries

January 8, 2017

Today we mark the 25th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Lithuania and Israel. We celebrate this remarkable date in an atmosphere of sincere friendship and true understanding. Our bonds run deep, as both of our countries have struggled to earn independence and overcome numerous challenges in our march towards better democracies, fair societies, indispensable human liberties, rights, peace, and freedom. When we stand together, a restored independent Republic of Lithuania and an independent Israel, no challenge is too great to overcome.

While our countries share only 25 years of diplomatic relations as independent states, the people of Lithuania and Israel have centuries of shared history. In spite of differences and tensions between religions, for many years, Jewish life in Lithuania thrived. In Vilnius, and other Lithuanian cities and towns, Jewish prayers and learning could be heard in synagogues and academies, modern Yiddish and Hebrew culture thrived, and many Jews and Christians labored to build for themselves a better and more peaceful life. Following the Soviet occupation early during World War II, which tragically ended Lithuania’s independence, the subsequent Nazi occupation inflicted great pain and huge losses upon the Jewish community. This is when the long history of the Jewish people of Lithuania had its most horrible pages. It is our utmost duty through remembrance and education to make sure that the incomparable tragedy of the Holocaust, the Shoah, never happens again. We have to commemorate the past by honoring the innocent victims and the righteous, by studying about the perpetrators and collaborators, as well as by building bilateral relations based on friendship and mutual respect.

Maintaining good and close relations is in the interests of Israel and Lithuania, and today, as in the past, cooperation between Israelis and Lithuanians has born remarkable fruits. There are numerous areas in which the relations between Lithuania and Israel are already quite strong and many more spheres in which the partnership could and will be expanded. Both countries are successfully developing high technologies. Lithuania is the global leader in laser technologies and communications, and Israel is the frontrunner in research and innovation. Our countries exchange experience in medicine, share methods of education and reveal their cultural treasures, cooperate in the fields of defense and security, look for opportunities to export and import from each other.

We are ready for closer work in preparing joint youth exchange programs, building cooperation between universities and schools of our countries. In the halls of the United Nations, Lithuania strongly supported Israel while, in turn, Israel has aided Lithuania in its goal to join the OECD. Everywhere you look, the ties between our two nations get deeper and stronger, the olive and oak, growing as one.

Today honoring our shared history and mutual bonds of trust, we welcome the progress already achieved and reaffirm our commitment to work together to establish a close partnership aimed at our common political, economic and social goals. Peace, prosperity, and freedom for all are our highest aspirations and Lithuania and Israel will continue to strive for them united.