



# Ukraine purges Holocaust guilt

IN THE Soviet Union's first official commemoration of the killings at Babi Yar, Leonid Kravchuk, the Ukrainian President, called it genocide and apologised for Ukraine's participation. He pledged support for President George Bush's initiative to review the United Nations resolution equating Zionism with racism.

"Babi Yar was a genocide and not only Nazis are to blame for it. Part of the blame lies with those who didn't prevent them from carrying it out, so part is ours and we think it is only natural to apologise before the Jewish people," said Mr Kravchuk in his speech on Saturday evening.

"We do not accept the ideological concept of the former Ukraine

From Susan Viets in Kiev

that neglected human rights, hid the truth about Babi Yar, hid the truth of the number killed there and the fact that most were of Jewish origin," he added.

Hundreds in the small audience cheered and waved Israeli flags when he ended with "Shalom", but a blue-and-white banner reminding Ukrainians that "the government of Israel is the reply to the Pale of Settlement of the Jewish people" was visible throughout the chilly four-hour outdoor ceremony, attended by President Bush's brother Jonathan.

Alexander Yakovlev, a member of the Soviet Presidential Council,

read out an unprecedented acknowledgement by Mikhail Gorbachev of the atrocities committed at Babi Yar, where 33,000 Jews were executed over two days, beginning on 29 September 1941. Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, gypsies and prisoners of war were also among the 100,000 victims who were murdered over 778 days.

Candles burned as visitors laid flowers at the edge of the ravine where dance music had played every Tuesday and Friday to drown out the screams during the executions. Metal fencing from the Jewish cemetery, used as crematorium grids by prisoners forced to

exhume and burn bodies when the Nazis withdrew, still dot the hillside.

Survivors holding signs with the names of their ghettos printed in red marched down the paved path to a *menorah* recently erected by the ravine. Half a mile away stands the bronze statue put up when Yevgeny Yevtushenko's haunting 1961 poem *Babi Yar* shamed the government into marking the site; yet until this month it refused to acknowledge that Jews were the main victims.

Mr Kravchuk presented Ukraine's Chief Rabbi with a 100-year-old Torah and promised that democrats and "bearers of the national tradition" in Ukraine would oppose anti-Semitism.