

NAZI hunters revealed yesterday they planned to use the case of an 88-year-old Adelaide man as an international test to pursue other suspected war criminals.

The Swiss-based Simon Wiesenthal Centre, which tracks down people believed to be war criminals, spoke yesterday of allegations concerning Mr Antanas Gudelis, of Prospect, in relation to events in Lithuania during World War II.

The centre's director, Dr Efraim Zuroff, said Mr Gudelis may face extradition or even trial "in absentia" as a result of evidence to be provided to the Lithuanian Government within two weeks.

But when contacted by The Advertiser last night, Mr Gudelis's family said they were "amazed and shocked" by the allegations.

Mr Gudelis would not comment but his son said the claims about his father's rank and places where events were alleged to have occurred were "just wrong".

Dr Zuroff said: "We have decided to make this the peak test case to pursuing the prosecution and possible extradition of (alleged) war criminals involved in the Lithuanian atrocities."

He said it would be one of three test cases to be presented to the Lithuanian Government, with another to follow in North America and another in Britain.

"We have recently learnt that people can be tried in absentia for war crimes in Lithuania," Dr Zuroff said.

He said the opening of KGB archives had yielded additional information, such as service records and documentation. It is understood Mr Gudelis has lived in Adelaide since the 1950s when he emigrated from Germany.

In the late '80s he was one of hundreds of people interviewed by the now-disbanded Australian Federal Police War Crime Unit. Dr Zuroff rejected suggestions that it was an exercise in futility to pursue such an old man over an alleged incident more than 50 years ago.

``They would not be saying those same things if those people had their parents and family murdered in such a brutal way," he said.

``We believe the passage of time in no way diminishes the responsibility of the person who committed the act."

Three suspected war criminals living in SA were charged under the Australian War Crimes Act.

Ivan Polyukhovich, 73, was charged in 1990 over the murder of 850 Jews between 1941 and 1943 in the Ukraine. Acquitted in May, 1993, Polyukhovich died on October 1, last year.

Heinrich Wagner was charged in 1991 with being involved in the death of 124 people in the Ukraine between 1942 and 1943. Charges were withdrawn because of ill-health.

Mikolay Berezowsky was charged in 1991 in relation to the murder of 62 Jewish people between March 1 and July 31, 1942. There was insufficient evidence for trial.