Prague, January 31, 2023

**Commemorating the victims of the holocaust is of an essential for our society today**

**The Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic and the Foundation for Holocaust Victims, in cooperation with the Office of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, held a commemoration meeting in the Main Hall of the Senate of the Czech Republic on the occasion of the Day of the Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity.**

The meeting was held under the auspices of the President of the Senate, Mr. Miloš Vystrčil, who in his opening address summarized the reasons why to commemorate the Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity is necessary. At the same time, he encouraged us to be inspired by the title of Righteous Among the Nations awarded in Israel… “*This title is awarded to people of non-Jewish descent who helped Jews overcome suffering or saved lives during World War II. We live today in a time when we are not usually forced to save the lives of others. And yet, I think the title Righteous Among the Nations should be an inspiration to us. The people who saved the Jews risked their own lives. We don't have to ask that of ourselves today. But what we should ask of ourselves to be righteous is that we should be able to help those whose lives are at risk, who are in a much more difficult situation than we are today. It should be the Ukrainians, for example, that we should think about. It should be the Jews in Russia, for example. And there are also members of sexual minorities. If we want to be just, then we should think about that and we should be inspired by the title Righteous Among the Nations in that sense.”*

Chairwoman of the Chamber of Deputies, Mrs. Markéta Pekarová Adamová, stated: *“So, we meet today to pay tribute together with respect to all those who have managed to preserve their humanity even in the darkest hours of our modern history. To all those who, in the face of adversities difficult to imagine, helped others in need and strove to save them. On this occasion, it is also worth recalling the words of Václav Havel:* «*All important events of the real world - beautiful as well as the monstrous ones - always have their prelude in the realm of words.*» *Thus, the words really matter. It is therefore necessary to treat them with the utmost responsibility and not to cause fear and frustration in society through public statements. These have never led (and will never lead) to any good*.”

The witness and prisoner of the Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau Mrs. Dita Krausová remembered her grandfather, professor Johann Polach, who had been a senator during the First Czechoslovak Republic. She continued with her life story. At the end she stated: *“I often go to schools and tell students about*« *my*» *Holocaust. They always listen attentively, and at the end they often ask:* «*What would you like us to learn from you? What is your message?* » *And I beg them: «When you have children, educate them against hatred. Don't tell them they mustn't play with a boy because he's black or with a girl because her eyes are slanted. Hatred is evil, it only causes suffering and war.* »*”*

Mrs. Alica Sigmund Heráková, member of the Inter-Ministerial Commission for Roma Community Affairs commemorated the long-time chair of the Committee for the Reparation of the Romani Holocaust, Mr. Čeněk Růžička who died at the end of last year and acknowledge his tireless work. In her speech, she also focused on the present and stated*: “Violence motivated by hate is an ever present phenomenon. Therefore, I would like to thank today to all the personalities in public life, but also to all the lesser known individuals who are not afraid to condemn and reject hate violence and respond to manifestations of racism and xenophobia. The experience of the Romani community as a whole remains often traumatic. Society is an organism, whether we want it or not we are all interconnected. The individual cannot be responsible for the whole, but he or she is responsible for himself or herself. We should seek courage in our daily lives, courage to stand up for the weaker and often also to stand up for ourselves.”*

President of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, Mr. Petr Papoušek, pointed out recent statement of the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, who *“compared the support of Western governments for Ukraine to Hitler's Final Solution, which resulted in the murder of six million Jews during the Shoah. He claimed that the United States had put together a coalition of European states to resolve the "Russian question" in the same way. This is not the first time he has used the equivalence of the Holocaust and Hitler references. It is appalling that such statements should be used by the top leader of a state whose army liberated Auschwitz 78 years ago, on the days when we commemorate the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. Now the army of the same state that rescued the survivors is driving them away from the death it is spreading. We must thank our government and, above all, all the citizens of the Czech Republic for taking in hundreds of thousands of refugees from Ukraine. This act is not taken for granted, the difficult times are not over yet and I believe that we will persevere in this support.”* Mr. Papoušek also expressed his thanks to the Czech government for responsible approach to the preparation of the National Strategy on Combating Antisemitism.

The ceremonial commemorative meeting was completed by pieces by Ernst Bloch and Karel Pexidor performed by Adéla Kamínková, Václav Dlask and Jan Mára from the NeoKlasik Orchestra.

Among the guests there were also two holocaust survivors from Ukraine who were forced to flee their homeland due to the Russian aggression and found shelter in the Czech Republic.

Part of this year's memorial meeting was the exhibition "Invisible Synagogues", of photographs by Štěpán Bartoš, displaying places where synagogues used to stand in various Czech towns. Most of them were irreversibly destroyed between 1938 and 1989 during the Nazi and Communist eras.

The annual commemorative gathering is attended by survivors of the Nazi concentration camps and their children, representatives of organizations that bring together former prisoners, senators, ambassadors, the Chief Rabbi, the Archbishop of Prague and other prominent figures in cultural, political and religious life.

This event is held thanks to the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Jewish Community in Prague.

Attachments:

Speakers' addresses