

Never more is now

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 commemorative meeting today in the Main Hall of the Senate of the Czech Republic on the occasion of Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Day of 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 speech focused on the importance of remembering and commemorating the Holocaust: *"Actively populating the space with credible and truthful information is imperative. The atrocities of the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity must persist in our society, etched into our collective memory, serving as a stark example of the perilous paths that hatred and indifference can lead. A tangible manifestation of our commitment to fulfilling duties, albeit occasionally delayed, is the inauguration this year of the Holocaust Memorial to Roma and Sinti in Lety u Písku. It is my hope that this memorial will ultimately stand as a dignified place of remembrance."*

Czech Prime Minister, Petr Fiala, also stressed the importance of commemorating the Holocaust and spoke out against manifestations of anti-Semitism: *"We should be concerned. The increasing anti-Semitism and ethnic hatred serve as a "litmus test" that something is amiss in the Western world. It arises when people start to forget the crucial historical lesson that evil is always in close proximity, capable of resurfacing among us at any time. Hence, acts of violence must not be tolerated. We must endeavor to engage in conversations with individuals who may be ensnared by animosity, those lacking a comprehensive understanding of history, or those yet to recognize the repercussions of embracing aggression as a commonplace or preferable stance. It is our shared duty to safeguard the vulnerable and combat hatred, unwaveringly, each day. Thank you."*

Ms. Doris Broul, a survivor of the Terezín ghetto and the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp, is filled with sadness that after 95 years of her life she has once again seen the rise of anti-Semitism. *"Whether we talk about anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, we are only using other words for the very ordinary hatred of others, which usually stems from ignorance, narrow-mindedness, and stupidity built on consciously or unconsciously spread lies. Unfortunately, the present, partly due to people's inability and, in worse cases, unwillingness of people to use new technologies wisely, the present is characterized by a wide and deliberate spread of conspiracies, rumors, misinformation – in short, lies. Lies that ultimately lead to hatred, expressed verbally, or at worst, through actions."* Ms. Broulova does not recall her wartime experience with bitterness, resentment and hatred; instead, her memories often return to expressions of ordinary human kindness. She concluded her speech with an appeal: *"My appeal is very simple. I would like to ask everyone to find goodness in themselves and, as much as their strength and nature allow, to spread this goodness further. Through ordinary human deeds, even just a polite greeting, a smile, but above all: the truth. I ask everyone to consciously refrain from spreading lies that can ultimately cause harm. Let us appreciate the freedom we can now enjoy in unprecedented abundance but let us not misuse it by harming others with our expressions. I appeal to people not to be led by hatred, and above all, not to pass it on"*.

Michal Mižigár, a representative of the Romani community, welcomed the construction of the memorial in Lety u Písku, which will be opened in April of this year. He called on legislators and politicians to push for the adoption of a definition of antigypsyism: *"The Czech Government's adoption of a clear definition of Antigypsyism is necessary to promote social cohesion and address systemic discrimination against the Romani community. A precisely defined concept will provide a basis for recognizing and combating anti-Roma prejudice, while ensuring legal clarity and promoting inclusion. By officially recognizing Antigypsyism, the government can take proactive measures to challenge stereotypes, improve education, and implement policies that promote equal opportunities for all citizens, thus contributing to a more tolerant and just society"*.



Michal Klíma, the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Foundation for Holocaust Victims, discussed the great increase in anti-Semitism around the world and the protests against the very existence of the State of Israel after the Hamas attack on 7 October 2023. *"There are only the last survivors of the Shoah among us. As the witnesses pass away, the memory disappears and the room opens up for new manifestations of racism and anti-Semitism. Holocaust Remembrance Day is an opportunity to recognize what these acts of hatred lead to and to take decisive action to stop them."* He expressed his gratitude to the representatives of the Government for their constructive and responsible approach to the prepared national strategy to combat anti-Semitism and appreciated the fundamental change in the approach of law enforcement authorities in assessing manifestations of anti-Semitism.

Petr Papoušek, the Chairman of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, moderated the memorial meeting and introduced the words: *"79 years ago, the Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated. As we approach its 80th anniversary next year, it is disheartening that Jews, our relatives, family members, and children, do not feel secure in today's world, including Europe. The Hydra of anti-Semitism has surged dramatically since the days of Covid, reaching alarming levels today. We gather here to remember and construct a memory vital for our future and security."* Finally, he read out a call by Holocaust survivors for the release of hostages in Gaza: *"Last year on October 7, Hamas gunmen invaded Israeli territory from the Gaza Strip, murdered and tortured with deliberate cruelty (children in front of their tied-up parents), and filmed and published their work. They killed at least 1139 people and took 240 into captivity: without choice, civilians, children, the elderly sick. Most of them still remain in captivity somewhere in Gaza under conditions that are unknown. It is now almost four months since new crimes against humanity were deliberately, demonstratively committed and are still ongoing. It is in the interest of generations present and future that the hostages forcibly taken and held in Gaza be returned home immediately. We demand their unconditional and immediate release."*

During the ceremonial meeting, concert performances were given by the Mackie Messer Klezmer Band. Part of this year's memorial meeting was an exhibition by Martin Korčok, The Tragedy of the Jews from the territory of Slovakia.

The commemorative meeting is being held thanks to the financial support of the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic and the Jewish Community in Prague.

