

**The Address by Michal Klíma,
Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Foundation for Holocaust Victims,
On the Occasion of
The Day of Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity
Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic,
26th January 2024**

On 27 January 1945, the Soviet army liberated Auschwitz. In 2005, the United Nations designated 27 January as the Holocaust Remembrance Day. On that occasion, the President of the UN General Assembly, Jan Eliason, emphasized that the end of the war and the suffering of prisoners in concentration camps did not automatically imply the end of crimes against humanity. He pointed out that **"the Holocaust must become a historical memento... and it is not sufficient to say that it must never be repeated."**

His words are particularly important to recall in these days. Following the bestial attack on Israel by Hamas terrorists on 7 October 2023, the slogan **"Never again is now"**, appeared among other slogans. The Gaza attack is not only symbolically linked to the Holocaust. After all, among the Israelis who were ambushed by terrorists were Shoah survivors. The governments of civilized countries were shocked by the attack – by its cruelty and barbarity – and Israel received their support. We are proud that the Czech Republic has been among the countries that have most visibly expressed support for Israel.

Unfortunately, however, the Hamas attack and the subsequent response of the Israeli army has sparked an unprecedented wave of anti-Semitic attacks and attacks against the very existence of the Israeli state. We have seen not only large demonstrations in the streets of cities around the world calling for the destruction of Israel, with the slogan demanding a free Palestine from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea, i.e. within the territory of the State of Israel, but also attacks on synagogues in European countries and in America. And we have even seen the marking of houses in which Jews live with Stars of David. In the United States, there have been open displays of anti-Semitism on college campuses, attacks on Jewish professors and students. A group of pro-Palestinian protesters at New York University forced their Jewish colleagues to lock themselves in the library and call the police to defend themselves. The images of angry demonstrators clinging to the windows of the room from which the besieged Jews were watching were reminiscent of a pogrom. All of this ultimately culminated in the unwillingness of three representatives of leading American universities to distance themselves from expressions of anti-Semitism and their refusal to openly declare that calls for the genocide of Jews violated their schools' charters.

Indeed – we have witnessed demonstrations condemning Israeli policies in the past. But now it does not involve criticism of Israel itself, but rather racial attacks against Jews. Paradoxically, among them may be those who themselves are critical of Israel's policies. After all, even among the victims of the Hamas attack there were people who were helping the Arabs in Gaza and trying to build good relations with them.

According to the American Anti-Defamation League, the number of anti-Semitic attacks in Austria increased by 300 percent after the Hamas attack on Israel! From 1 October to 18 October 2023, 218 anti-Semitic crimes were committed in the UK, thirteen times more than in the same period last year. In Germany, the Rias organization has registered a 240 per cent increase in such acts since 7 October. In France, the Ministry of the Interior counted a total of 588 such acts. And in the US, the Anti-

Defamation League is talking about an increase of almost four hundred percent. Among them are threats received by Jewish students at Cornell University in New York State. For example, "Watch out, Jews, the jihad is coming!" According to the FBI, Jews make up 2.4% of the U.S. population but are the victims of 63% of reported religiously motivated hate crimes.

After the initial shock caused by the unprecedented brutality of the terrorist attack, there are now voices that relativize the attack. UN Secretary-General António Guterres said after the largest massacre of Jews since the Holocaust that the Hamas attack did not happen "in a vacuum". Even across the EU there is a line between countries that support Israel and those that see it in "context". We are seeing such relativization in our country, not only in discussions on social media, but also in the media that consider themselves as being progressive. The slogan "'From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free'" can be interpreted in different ways and it is not correct to automatically perceive it as a call for the genocide of the Jews. No matter that it is the creation of an Arab Palestinian state on Israeli territory that is Hamas's stated objective. There are also rumors that Israel is responsible for the attack against itself. This was meant, however, not in the sense that by handing over Gaza to the Palestinians Israel gave up the possibility of effectively preventing the development of the terrorist movement, but on the contrary that it was not very friendly to the Gazans.

The upsurge in attacks against Jews since last October is, unfortunately, just a development in the trend of rising anti-Semitism in recent years. Even in the Czech Republic, the number of anti-Semitic attacks increased more than sixfold from 2018 to 2022, reaching 2,277 in 2022, according to the Federation of Jewish Communities. Last year, after 7 October, anti-Semitism in this country increased by 400 % year-on-year.

These figures show that we are not isolated from the latest developments in the rest of the world. Meanwhile, the main difference is that anti-Semitism in our country is mostly in the form of racist expressions on social media and extremist websites.

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.

Governments in civilized countries perceive the rise of anti-Semitism and want to combat it. Two years ago, the European Commission presented its **Strategy to combat anti-Semitism and promote Jewish life**. The Strategy comprises measures to prevent and combat all forms of anti-Semitism, education, research, the development of Jewish life and the memory of the victims of the Holocaust. This has been followed by a number of steps at EU and non-EU level that support and put into practice measures against anti-Semitism. In the US, President Biden announced a strategy to combat anti-Semitism a year ago. It contains 100 challenges and actions that legislators should take. The adoption of a national strategy against anti-Semitism is also being actively prepared in our country, and I would like to thank the representatives of the Government for their very constructive and responsible approach to this issue.

Importantly, there has also been a change in the approach of law enforcement authorities in assessing manifestations of anti-Semitism. The court is currently dealing with the production of calendars and mugs with portraits of Nazi leaders, which caused a great stir some time ago and about which I also spoke here, and in 2020 I filed a criminal complaint against their maker. Last September, the Supreme Court issued a ruling stating that "the perpetrator's motive, such as property, to publicly deny, question,

approve, or justify genocide and other crimes against humanity, war crimes, or crimes against peace is not essential to meeting the elements of this offense." This is a fundamental change, because until now the courts have accepted a defense based on the fact that the defendants did not act with the intention of promoting Nazism, but only for material reasons.

Finally, let me once again recall a nearly two-decade-old sentence by the then President of the UN General Assembly, Jan Eliasson: "**the Holocaust must become a historical memento... 'We should not say 'never again'. Each time we say, 'never again', we have failed.'**"