

**The Address of Miloš Vystrčil,
The President of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic,
on the occasion of the Holocaust Remembrance Day
and the Day of Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity
Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic
26th January 2024**

Dear survivors,

Representatives of Jewish Communities and Roma Community,

Mr. Prime Minister,

Distinguished Constitutional Officers,

Representatives of diplomatic missions,

Dear Mr. Rabbi,

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, television viewers.

I extend a warm welcome to you from the central hall of the Czech Senate, and it brings me great joy that our gatherings continue to take place in this esteemed venue. This marks the 19th occasion on which we have solemnly observed Holocaust Remembrance Day and underscored our commitment to preventing crimes against humanity.

Our assembly is dedicated to honoring and commemorating the victims, a sentiment that remains steadfast. Simultaneously, the significance of our gathering has evolved, with a burgeoning emphasis on acknowledging and recalling the crimes against humanity and the Holocaust. This shift is propelled by the imperative need to draw connections to the present, for our collective welfare and in light of contemporary events.

Some still vividly recall the Holocaust, while the rest of us should invest time in learning more about those tragic events. I'm pleased that Doris Broul will share her insights today, and I thank her for joining us. Time is our most precious possession, and by dedicating it to listening to victims and survivors, we express respect and a commitment to learning from our past.

In alignment with these sentiments, I reflected on similar thoughts during my recent visit to Israel alongside the Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Markéta Pekarová Adamová. The Hamas terrorist attack, causing the most substantial loss of Jewish lives since the Holocaust, occurred only 79 years after the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp. This brutal act underscores the continued targeting of Jews through violent terrorism. Consequently, it is our duty to stand unequivocally on their side, firmly supporting Israel.

„A person's life endures as long as they hold onto the memories they must never forget.” This poignant insight, as quoted by the Lithuanian writer of Jewish heritage, Grigory Kanovich, from his mother Henka's memoirs, resonates profoundly. I had the privilege of launching his book recently in Děčín. It emphasizes the vital truth that, regardless of the circumstances, we must retain in our memory those important lessons that remain relevant today. Failing to remember the things, we must not forget, would place us in great peril, rendering our lives hollow. This serves as a stark reminder that our collective recollection not only safeguards our past but also shapes our present and future.

However, emptiness and lethargy are not the gravest perils we face. The tragic consequences arise when hatred and a disregard for human life prevail. Last year, we commemorated the two innocent victims of the shooting in Bratislava. It is bewildering that this year we must once again remember the victims of another shooter who carried out his heinous acts in our own city, Prague. Following the remembrance and the profound experience of sorrow and pain, inevitable questions arise. At the forefront of these inquiries is the pivotal question of how to furnish our societies, our followers, with, at the very least, a fundamental sense of security.

The year 2024 is marked by a multitude of elections spanning the globe, including Europe, the USA, and various other regions. These elections pose a potential risk of empowering those who seek to erase crucial lessons from our collective memory, a scenario we cannot permit. The looming threat is particularly pronounced with the potential ascent of far-right and populist factions exploiting challenging circumstances. Nationalism, coupled with defining oneself in opposition to another group based on differences in color, religion, or gender identity, constitutes a toxic brew that could contaminate both us and our democratic societies.

Hence, we often discuss the notion of the last chance. I acknowledge the frequent use of the term "last chance," which may not be well-received, especially in the realms of climate and a democratic, free society. Despite our reluctance, these words bear weight, perhaps dulled by repetition. Yet, the reality persists that whether we inhale emissions-laden air or air steeped in falsehoods and misinformation, consequences are inevitable — manifesting in illness and a worsening state. In these challenging times, marked by a less than ideal social and economic climate, it is crucial to recognize that while our current situation may not be optimal, it has been worse. The historical context of the Holocaust, originating in economically distressed Germany, serves as a stark reminder of the fragility of our societies, presently exacerbated by economic strains and a decline in confidence.

Such gatherings assume heightened significance. Meeting our obligations to the victims of the Holocaust and other victims of crimes against humanity becomes increasingly crucial and challenging. Moreover, it becomes paramount to not only uphold these responsibilities but also to instill in ourselves, particularly in our children and grandchildren, a resolute commitment. 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 traverse.

We must actively fill the space with credible and truthful information. The horrors of the Holocaust and other crimes against humanity must endure in our society, ingrained in our collective memory, as an example of how far 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.

Finally, I extend my heartfelt gratitude for your presence on this significant day. As previously emphasized, time is our most valuable asset. Hence, it is crucial that we use it judiciously, investing it in matters of utmost importance. I sincerely value the opportunity we have today to dedicate our time to honoring the memory of the Holocaust victims and underscore the imperative of remembering and preventing crimes against humanity. Thank you for joining us and for generously sharing the most precious gift you possess — your time.