

**The Address of Petr Papoušek
Chairman of the Federation of Jewish Communities in 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,
27th January 2023**

The majority of us are feeling a crisis that we would never have imagined a short time ago. Societies are divided and prone to easy solutions. In Europe today, Holocaust denial in mainstream society is negligible and, on the wane, which is good news. It is easier to fight against evil that is easily recognizable. Unfortunately, a more dangerous and crucial problem that is emerging more and more frequently is the distortion and misrepresentation of what the Holocaust was, how it happened, and what consequences it had and has for millions of people among us. We find ourselves at a time when many survivors have already left and the voice of those who are with us is fading. It is likely that those who wish to manipulate and distort are happy about this situation and therefore it is our duty to be the memory of survivors that shall never fade.

It has only been a few days since the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation 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.

The Federation of Jewish Communities, with financial support from the EU, publishes an annual report on anti-Semitism in the Czech Republic. We must state that during the Covid pandemic and the current crisis we have seen a long-term increase in anti-Semitism, especially in the online environment. This worldwide trend is related to the search for a scapegoat to blame for all problems and difficulties. We have seen it in the past and we see it today. It must be made clear that what is criminal in the physical world is also criminal in the online environment, where it is easy to radicalize participants. Indeed, we can recall the recent terrorist attack in Bratislava, where two members of the LGBTQ community were murdered by a 19-year-old young man. According to the information available, his primary target was the Jewish community and he had been planning the attack for a long time. The radicalization of the attacker took place on a website where the far right and the spreaders of disinformation were mainly meeting. Our society is not immune to these acts, and we must defend ourselves and highlight all manifestations of hatred, xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism.

The Czech Republic will adopt a National Strategy to Combat Anti-Semitism this year, which should include goals and measures in areas such as: Law and security, online anti-Semitism, education and Holocaust remembrance, and support for Jewish life. We would like to thank all the ministries involved in the preparation, in particular the Prime Minister who supported this initiative. Further to what has already been said here, financial support for ensuring the security of Jewish communities is an important part of the strategy. The Foundation for Holocaust Victims has been a long-standing partner for the state in securing funding to support Jewish life, and we appreciate that this cooperation has been reiterated as part of the new strategy being developed as one way to combat phenomena that are dangerous to our democracy.

I'd like to end with the ageless lyrics of the Rolling Stones song Gimme Shelter – “War, children, is just a shot away. “Let us therefore be united.