

**The Address of Miloš Vystrčil,
The President of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic,
The Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Day of Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity
Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic,
27th January 2023**

Dear survivors and your loved ones,

Dear representatives of the Jewish communities and the Roma community,

Dear President of the Chamber of Deputies, Dear Minister,

Distinguished representatives of diplomatic staff,

Honorable Constitutional Authorities,

Dear Chief Rabbi, Dear Eminent Cardinal,

Dear representatives of documentation and memory institutions,

Dear television viewers,

Welcome to the Main Hall of the Czech Senate.

We are meeting here again on 27 January for the 18th time. Today we commemorate the Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Day of Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity. It is exactly 78 years since the Red Army liberated the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp. It was at that moment that the brutality with which Jews and other people were treated in the extermination camps was fully exposed for the first time. We are here today to commemorate this liberation, and there are several reasons for our meeting.

The first reason is that we must take care of historical memory. Our memory indeed has two characteristics. The first is that we can recall the events that happened. And the second is that we tend to forget. Typically, we tend to retain pleasant memories in our minds and forget what was unpleasant. This is very dangerous, because history is an invaluable teacher. History is what we must both know and learn today and every day. It is not right and it is not acceptable to draw thick lines. For a thick line is a dam that could stop the river of knowledge and learning. And we must not allow that to happen, because we could pay the price for it now and especially in the future.

The second reason we commemorate Holocaust Remembrance Day is that totalitarianism, authoritarianism and hatred are not a thing of the past. Not far from us, in Ukraine, innocent civilians are being murdered today. Not far from us, the Putin regime continues to make anti-Semitic statements, including those against top political leaders such as Volodymyr Zelensky. Not far from us, the Putin regime is preventing Russian families of Jewish origin from leaving the country, and not only for Israel.

As for hatred, it is not only the privilege of totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. We can also observe hatred in our free and democratic countries. For instance, let us recall the hate speech that cost the lives of two young people in Slovakia in October 2022. Therefore, let us not forget - totalitarianism,

authoritarianism and hatred are still alive. And we all know what it can cause. We all know what we discovered on 27 January 1945 at the liberation of Auschwitz.

The third reason we commemorate the Holocaust Remembrance Day and the Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity today is to remember that fates and words are powerful weapons. And there are people among us who have had very tragic fates, but who are nevertheless willing to share them and teach others a lesson. There are people here among us whose word is of great importance. And we need to take advantage of this when we commemorate a part of history that we cannot be proud of. I am delighted that the Czech Senate has joined the "We Remember" campaign and together, before the Senate meeting, we reminded ourselves that the events that took place during the Second World War, events that are full of anti-Semitism, events that meant the extermination and death of many people, should be remembered and lessons should be learned.

In conclusion, let me say that Israel bestows the title of the Righteous Among the Nations. 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. Therefore, I wish us all to be able to do that, to be able not only to think of ourselves, but to think of our surroundings as well. For only if we can do this, if we behave in this way, then we will truly live in a world that is fair to all and that allows all to realize themselves and to live freely and democratically.

Thank you for your attention.