**Closing statement of Tomáš Kraus,**

**The Secretary of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic,**

**On the Occasion of**

**The Day of Commemoration in Memory of Victims of the Holocaust**

**And Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity**

**Senate of the Czech Parliament**

**27th January 2020**

Anatolij Pavlovič Šapiro was born in 1913 into a Jewish family living in Poltava region of Ukraine. He graduated at the Technological Institute in Zaporozhye where he later worked as an engineer. In June 1941, after the Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union, he voluntarily joined the army. He worked his way up and became a commander of the infantry battalion and fought several major battles of the Eastern front. He was wounded near Kursk, but few months later he returned to the front lines. His battalion fought harsh battles with Wehrmacht and gradually took back the territory of Ukraine and Poland. At the beginning of 1945, his 106th Division suffered heavy losses, but finally, they managed to push the enemy to flight and advance to a place where there was some camp, supposedly a POW camp. Major Šapiro personally opened its doors. This took place on Saturday, 27 January 1945, at 3pm, on a Sabbath.

We all know the course of the following events from the history books. Auschwitz I., Auschwitz-Birkenau, Monovice! We know how many people died in those places, we know about the atrocious ideology, which lead the mankind to the edge of ruin. This happened in the enlightened 20th century. We can track and assign names to particular events; we have the lists and numbers of the prisoners that were tattooed on their bodies. We have their last possessions, piles of suitcases, clothes, glasses, hair, shoes, toys. We know how many children were murdered there. Nevertheless, we still get it all wrong. We have no idea why it all started. What happened with our parents, grandparents, their relatives and friends? What happened with the world they had known before the WWII? Who allowed it to happen? Where was the world? No, we will never understand it, we simply have to accept this fact.

Though, we cannot accept the fact that today, three quarters of a century later, we hear voices claiming that Holocaust never happened, that it was all fabricated in order to…No, this does not make sense. We should not get defensive in order to defend our truth. The facts speak for us and we cannot and must not defend these facts.

I would like to talk about the atmosphere around the world. Every day, we get the news from all continents and it is the kind of news we never expected to hear again. The number of attacks on the Jewish institutions and individuals does not only rise, but the character of the attacks changes – verbal assaults are turning into physical, often with tragic consequences. Well, we can say that the terrorism is a global issue, we can say that such attacks are committed by psychopaths. Anti-Semitism is not a pose, it is an illness. But…How do we explain our rational approach to those who were affected by these sudden tragedies?

Fortunately, I am not describing the Czech society. Czech society is – or still seems to be – relatively immune to such manifestations. Well, how long will it last? The generations change, people change, their opinions change. Opinions evolve even due to the confusing myriad of facts or opinions that keep flooding us from social networks and very often create some kind of a virtual reality. Will we be able to keep common sense in our nowadays “jungle”? Can we find our way through it and can we help others to be able to get other people oriented? By all means, we shall all at least give it a try. Czech political representation and social scene should be an active partner on this way.

Every year we hear the words that encourage us in our effort, which is to preserve the remembrance of Shoa to other generations. And it is us, who should not give up, the people who belong to a so called second or even third generation of the victims and survivors. It is and it will remain our responsibility to pass the experience of our parents and grandparents on to the next generation.

I know, that the Czech people are aware of this responsibility. But the daily reality cannot always comfort us. Exactly one year ago, both chambers of the Czech Parliament adopted a definition of anti-Semitism in a wording accepted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance. This was a meritorious and consensual act. Since then we have been trying to implement the fundaments of this definition into Czech law. We have been successful in many governmental departments, though, in one of the key departments, the Department of Education, we have not yet been invited for talks on ministerial level.

I would like to present one more unsuccessful example – we have all heard about the plan to transform the Bubny Railway Station into a dignified memorial of fifty thousand Jewish citizens of Prague, who started their journey into the unknown from this station; the majority of them never returned. The project has been prepared for many years and there were lots of negotiations. So far, there are some administrative obstacles that prevent its completion. The authors have now been contemplating whether to stop the project or whether to continue.

To meet several times during the year to make sure that we are on the same side and perceive our moral obligations based on the historical experience is not enough. We need to act now, and we need to act fast.