

PRESS RELEASE PUBLISHED BY THE FEDERATION OF JEWISH COMMUNITIES  
AND THE FOUNDATION FOR HOLOCAUST VICTIMS

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**Commemorating the victims of the Holocaust is of an essential for our society today**

**The Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic and the Foundation for Holocaust Victims, in cooperation with the Office of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic, held a commemoration meeting today in the Main Hall of the Senate of the Czech Republic on the occasion of the Day of the Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity.**

The meeting was held under the auspices of the President of the Senate, Miloš Vystrčil, who in his opening address mentioned the words of Yehuda Bauer, an Israeli historian from Prague: *"You, your children and your children's children shall never become perpetrators"; "You, your children and your children's children shall never allow yourselves to become victims"; and "You, your children and your children's children shall never, but never, be passive onlookers to mass murder, genocide, or (let us hope it may never be repeated) to a Holocaust-like tragedy."*

Speaker of the Chamber of Deputies, Markéta Pekarová Adamová, stated: *"The Holocaust and its inconceivable horrors, which were imprinted on the fates and memories of several generations, cannot be forgotten. Evil cannot be eradicated unless its cause is also eradicated. As a society, we should therefore consistently reject all forms of aggression - including verbal aggression. We must not remain silent when someone is humiliated, ridiculed, or even attacked for being different. Hate cannot be eliminated, but it can be left alone enough to prevent it from spreading. The Holocaust taught us a simple truth: silence is the first step towards acceptance. Silence can also become complicity. We are here today not to remain silent."*

Helga Hošková-Weissová, the witness, described the establishment of the Terezín Initiative, an association of former Terezín prisoners in 1990 and its activities: *"We survivors began to testify. We were also invited to German schools. It is not easy to talk about war experiences. Some still can't do it. We haven't talked about it in a long time. The atrocities and conditions in the camps cannot be imagined anyway. Yet when the pseudo-historians began to claim that the Holocaust did not exist, we could no longer remain silent. We consider it our duty to testify. As I tell my life story, I see the events vividly before me and relive them. It upsets and tires me. When I leave for a lecture, my son always comments, "Are you going on the transport again?" She stressed that manifestations of anti-Semitism, racism and xenophobia must be nipped in the bud. She concluded her address with a personal memory, a poem by her father.*

Jana Horváthová, the director of the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno, drew attention to the constantly overlooked topic of the Romani genocide during World War II and the Museum's efforts to make it an inseparable part of our history. *"In our beautiful country, we have a large number of valuable cultural monuments, ancient castles and chateaus that are falling into decay and require financial injections. And yet, even in today's difficult times, let us not forget the almost 30-year struggle for Lety u Písku. In order for the memorial to actually be built on that site, we need your support, the Roma need our support! I keep hearing from Romani ranks the call for acceptance by this society, I keep hearing an offended and sometimes defiant voice calling for an end to the disparagement. That voice is at least as old as the First Republic. The victims have become victims and are silent, but we speak for them, their fates cannot be a forgotten past, we want them to become part of our history, where they truly belong."*

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Michal Klíma, the Chairman of the Foundation for Holocaust Victims' board of trustees, stressed the importance of Holocaust commemoration at this time, when manifestations of anti-Semitism are on the rise in the Czech Republic and symbols of Jewish persecution are being denigrated. He thanked legislators from most political parties for the amendment to the Criminal Code, which now explicitly prohibits support and promotion of movements aimed at suppressing the rights and freedoms of citizens: *"It is often debated whether the criminalization of such publications is not an interference with the right to freedom of speech. Given our country's recent totalitarian history, it is important to engage in this debate. Every person should have the right to express his or her opinion freely. But denial of reality and lies are not expressions of opinion, they are just denials of reality and lies. It is not an expression of opinion when someone says that a house that is on fire is not on fire, or that there is no danger of flooding when a flood wave is rolling in. It is a sign of the strength of democracy, not its weakness, if it can define freedom of speech in such a way that no one is restricted from expressing his or her opinion, and, at the same time, that there is no punishment for spreading lies, misinformation, and hatred of a certain group of people because of their race, faith, or beliefs."* At the same time, he thanked journalists who are concerned first and foremost with freedom of speech, who see the importance of not allowing freedom of speech to be abused to spread hatred and deny reality.

The Chairman of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, Petr Papoušek, moderated the memorial meeting and introduced it by saying: *"Only if we know the past can we defend our future. And we are here to defend the future, which today seems to be complicated. We have not forgotten only so that the Holocaust - the Shoah, or similar events - never repeated, but to pay tribute to the victims and survivors."*

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Speakers' addresses