**On the occasion of the Day of Commemoration in Memory of Victims of the Holocaust**

**and Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity, held on the premises of the Czech Senate,**

**a call upon personal responsibility of each and every one of us was heard.**

**The Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic and the Foundation for Holocaust Victims, in collaboration with the Office of the Senate of the Czech Parliament, held a commemorative meeting on the occasion of the Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Holocaust Victims and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity. The meeting was held in the main hall of the Czech Senate. The survivors of the Holocaust, representatives of the governmental authorities and diplomats commemorated the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the concentration and extermination camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau, which was liberated on 27 January 1945.**

On the opening of the meeting the audience observed a moment of silence in memory of Jaroslav Kubera, the President of the Senate, who had passed away shortly before the event. The Vice President of the Senate, Jiří Oberfalzer, read Jaroslav Kubera’s speech: *„We have to rouse all polite people to stand strong and be active when facing any form of evil and demagogy. We have to define the boundaries to the deconstruction of the basic principles of humanity and democracy. Even seemingly marginal manifestations of gross behaviour and intolerance to the opinions of others, because the evil can have catastrophic dimensions.“*

The President of the Chamber of Deputies of Czech Parliament, Radek Vondráček stated: „*We are the creators of our own good times and bad times. All of us. All of the people. We shall remain human and respect other human beings and their dignity. The path leading to the Holocaust opened alongside with common people adapting to Nazi ideology. …* *close the door in the face of those who spread fear and hatred and who label others. It is up to us. We all have to keep our own door closed so that the evil cannot enter into our lives. This is the only way that will prevent the Holocaust from ever repeating again.”*

Jana Horváthová, a director of the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno added: *„…no matter how well we feel in any community or group of people or when we benefit from these groups, we have to stay alert whether we still defend our humanity, which ends there, where we take it away from others. I am convinced that the majority of people is born into this world with positive ideals, but it is for the contradiction between our interests - the interests of individuals endowed with their own ego – that break us up and lead us down paths long. In such matters, and matters similar to the ones I described, we have to be cautious.“*

The chairman of the Board of Directors of the Foundation for Holocaust Victims, Michal Klíma, addressed the already medialized case, though still unsolved, of the sales of mainly tourist merchandise portraying the faces of war criminals and made an appeal on the present lawmakers to update the Czech Penal Code: *„*…*every year we meet on these premises to commemorate the victims of the Nazi terror. A couple of hundred meters away from this place, shops sell merchandise portraying the Nazi leaders. Let us ensure that our society finally deals with this shame once and for all. I believe that this would be the best way to honor all those innocent murdered people.“*

Eva Pokorná, shared her family story, the story of the persecution her family suffered during WWII, with the audience at the commemorative meeting: *„Me, my aunt with her five-year-old son, grandma and grandpa’s sister were put on the cattle wagons and transported to the ramp of Auschwitz-Birkenau where we arrived two days later. I carried a haversack where I had some things for my small cousin, but when the SS commanders shouted at us to throw away all our luggage, I threw it away. My auntie told me that haversack was not luggage, so I tried to pick it up again, but I was not allowed to. This move made me stay one step behind the family at the point where the SS commander was selecting the people. My aunt, her child, grandma and grandpa’s sister were all sent to one side while I was sent to the other. This meant that I was the only one who survived. … All of my life I did my best to help my family and others. The feeling of being helpful to others brought me a great satisfaction.“*

On a closing note, the Secretary of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, Tomáš Kraus, said: *„Every year we hear the words that encourage us in our effort, which is to preserve the remembrance of Shoa for 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. “*

The meeting was attended, this time in higher count, by the representatives of the second generation, i.e. the children of the Holocaust survivors: „*With respect to the fact, that I was raised in a family that had their relatives in almost all existing concentration camps and more than sixty of those relatives were murdered in gas chambers and during the death marches, I feel strongly obliged to keep my finger pointed against the hatred and mutual destruction of the people.“,* said Zuzana Peterová.

Part of the commemorative meeting was an exhibition of the Jewish Museum in Prague called „I Haven’t Seen a Butterfly Around Here: Children’s Drawings from the Terezín Ghetto.“ The event also hosted an informal release of a book, Mengele’s Twin A-782, written by Pavel Baroch. The book portrays a story of Jiří Fišer, who survived the Auschwitz concentration camp as an eight-year-old boy.

Prague, 27 January 2020

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Attachment: The Speeches of the Speakers