

**The Address by Helga Weiss-Hošková,  
survivor of Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp,  
On the Occasion of  
The Day of Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity  
Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic,  
27th January 2022**

I'm one of the last survivors. By a lucky coincidence, I survived Terezín, Auschwitz, and the labour camp in Freiberg. On 5 May 1945, I was liberated by the American Army from Mauthausen. I'm not going to tell you my story today. I have said and written everything many times, among other things in two books, "Diary 1938-1945" and "Nobody Expected Us". I'm an academic painter. I always bring experiences and feelings into my paintings. Art can influence and affect thinking. One can also fight through the arts. In Terezín, culture helped us survive. The works outlive their creators. Hopefully, my paintings will speak to and encourage viewers to think, and my voice will be heard even after I am gone. Many books have been written about the Holocaust and countless films have been made. Journalists and filmmakers keep coming and asking me questions. Each of them believes that they will create something original and sensational, and, most of all, profitable. I always tell them, "Don't make anything up, the facts will surpass all your imagination.

After the war, nobody cared about the Holocaust for a long time. The Terezín ghetto was not talked about for all the years under communist rule. Only the Small Fortress, where the vigils were held, was visited. The bus didn't even stop in Terezín, as if the ghetto had never been there. They set up an SNB museum (a museum of the National Security Force of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic) in the school building where the boys' home used to be.

It was only in 1989 that we, former prisoners, founded an organization we called the Terezín Initiative. Marta Kottová and I attended a meeting in some kind of a hall in Karlín, in Prague. The attendees contributed to the discussion. I didn't dare, but Marta stepped up to the stage and stated confidently, "We are here for the Jews." A few of us then met in Šárka Verešová's apartment, Mirek Kárný, who was more experienced in organizing, joined us and we agreed to form an organization of former prisoners from Terezín. In 1990, the Constituent Assembly was convened in the auditorium of the Faculty of Law of Charles University, where we elected a committee, and we called the organization the Terezín Initiative.

Our goal was to keep the Holocaust in memory and to pass on the testimony to the next generation. One of the first concrete tasks set by the Terezín Initiative was to ensure that the memory of the transports that left Prague first for Łódź and then for Terezín would be preserved in a dignified manner. We were not the first to come up with this idea. As early as the mid-1960s, a commemorative plaque was made, the work of Břetislav Benda, and was to be placed in the former Radiotr market site. However, the intervention of the District

Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in Prague 7 prevented its installation with a nonsensical justification - because of Israel's policy towards Arabs. The long-lasting struggle to change this decision, in which the architect Šanda was the most active, always ended in a negative decision of the district committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In the spring of 1989, part of this plaque was taken to Terezín and installed in the city walls. In February 1990, we approached the Mayor of Prague with the idea of a new memorial plaque at the site of the Jewish gathering place and received his support. I was asked to design and make the memorial plaque. I created a figurative relief with the text "In memory of more than 80,000 Czech Jews murdered in 1941-1945. 45,513 men, women and children were deported from these places." It is also engraved with the Hebrew word JISKOR - Remember. The memorial plaque was placed on a concrete wall in front of the Parkhotel in Holešovice in Veletržní Street, on the site of the former Radiotrnh market, where transports were gathered. It was unveiled on 16 October 1991, the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the deportations. Many former prisoners came from abroad, some of whom we didn't even know had survived. They hugged, kissed, laughed and cried with joy and with emotions. The following day, the Terezín Ghetto Museum was inaugurated.

The Terezín Memorial began to organize school trips and seminars for teachers, and former prisoners began to tell their stories. 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?"

We have adapted to the current conditions, and I chat with students during lectures via Skype.

Today, some people compare pandemic restrictions to the Nazi regulations of the Holocaust period. In September 2021, a Czech MP compared the vaccination against covid-19 to the experiments on children by Nazi doctor Josef Mengele. A year ago, the President of the Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic said "...I find it outrageous if people who demonstrate, for example, against vaccination, mark themselves with a yellow Star of David. It is an expression of endless disrespect for what the people marked with the yellow star had experienced." Yes, the history repeats itself. Antisemitism, racism, xenophobia. People are murdered because of their skin color, their religion. Totalitarian practices persist in a number of cases. People ruthlessly destroy themselves for money, for envy, for career. Groups march through the streets freely chanting fascist slogans, just as the Hitler Youth once did. We shall not underestimate these manifestations. They need to be nipped in the bud.

I would like to end my address with a personal memory, with my father's, Otto Weiss' poem called "the Prayer". The poem was published in a collection of poems called "This is How the Stars Hurt", which was written in Terezín in 1938-1944:

My God, can you hear me? It's me.  
Me, the Heretic, the unbeliever,  
The anxious one who's asking you  
With his silly *why* and *what for*, thousand times  
Veiled in a mysterious and impenetrable gloom,  
About the meaning of your deeds, their purpose and reason,  
Why have you let us face such an evil fate and treason?

And if it's not a man's nature to ponder...  
About the meaning of your plans,  
Why have you given the man your soul,  
Which forever wanders over deadly heights,  
Dwells in contradictions with no light in sight.

Will I ever find my way through the maze  
And get a stable thought and unifying law,  
A faint glimmer of hope and a safe quest  
Helping me to bear even the most difficult of tests?

I would give anything for being someone else,  
Have a believing heart in peace and tranquility,  
with no doubts and sultry awe...

When I pretend the freedom, it is from despair  
When I brag in defiant disbelief,  
It's a mask of a desperate man who weeps when alone,  
Over human helplessness and humility,  
That he'd be inhuman or hopeless,  
Standing by and overlooking the destruction,  
To which your work and our world are forever forfeited.

Or is it by Your will that our world becomes hell?  
That soon there will be no stone left unturned.

How violent the anger and rage must have been,  
How badly mankind must have annoyed you,

That thou hast pronounced the harshest judgment upon it of all:  
So let his next pilgrimage be without God,  
Honor, truth, love, affection? - All this now aside,  
Let depravity and violence become holy pride.

Can you hear me, oh, my God?  
I came here to ask,  
If setting your good old order  
Ever be your task.

The dream of it has given Your faithful ones to bear even punishment,  
They waited with that faith  
And fell into the grave.

How I would like to taste of that faith, even if it is false,  
A fate, same as the one of others perhaps is my course.

No, I'd like to live, I love the life so much,  
I still want to be happy and sometimes laugh,  
I want to be there when Noah's ark  
Gloriously anchors and new times will start.

Oh, sometimes I feel like I should be closer to You,  
Then again, my sighs you can't even hear.

Give me faith, O God, that thou wilt loose thy people from their bonds,  
That only in the end you will not let us disappear.