

**The Address of Miloš Vystrčil,
The President of the Senate of the Czech Parliament,
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 2021**

Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear guests, dear TV viewers,

I am very glad that we can meet here in the Main Hall of the Senate of the Czech Parliament, in the Valdštejn Palace, at least in such a limited number of guests, and I appreciate it very much. When I looked at the history of the Holocaust, I realized that it took 59 years. 59 years have passed since the liberation of Auschwitz, and only after 59 years, in 2004, a law was adopted in the Czech Republic, which established the Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust and the Day of Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity as a significant day. And it took "the world" another year longer. It had not been until 2005, after 60 years since the liberation of Auschwitz, that the UN declared 27th January as the International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of the Holocaust. So the question is, why did it take so long? Why did it take so long for us to realize that crimes against humanity and the Holocaust need to be remembered? They need to be firmly embedded in our every year life! There can be various reasons for that. Maybe, at the beginning, people claimed that they still remember those events, that there was no need to recall recent experiences as such. Perhaps, some did not want to, because it brought back very painful memories with them. Perhaps, some did not want to, because they believed and wanted it to be forgotten. Fortunately, this did not happen, and today we are here in the Main Hall of the Senate of the Czech Parliament, commemorating the Holocaust and the crimes against humanity. Allow me to greet all the survivors from this place. I'm so sorry they couldn't come here today to talk to us. The pandemic situation unfortunately does not allow that. I keep my fingers crossed for them and wish them good health. At the same time, I also want to express my respect and thank them. I want to express my respect and thank all the survivors who today overcame their inner pain and who will pass on to others their experiences, the experiences they lived through in different concentration camps. Especially to the young audience. It is very important. Their courage to share life story is very important, they do a great and meritorious work. And I thank them very much for that. I also want to pay my respects and thank all those who returned from the concentration camps and found that where they once lived, there was nothing left. No friends, no homes, no relationships. And they decided to build their new homeland. And they did it, they founded and built the state of Israel. I am grateful to them for this and I thank them very much for it. At the same time, I realize that tonight, coincidentally, also on 27 January, people in Israel and not only in Israel, but all

other people will celebrate the New Year of Trees. I wish them to enjoy the holidays, to be strong, and I wish them all the best.

At the same time, I have to note one more important thing. We in Europe are very fond of boasting that we are the most advanced continent, that we have the best democracy here, that we have the best quality of life here, and that we hold principles and values here. To a certain extent this is true, with some reservations and some mistakes. On the other hand, the fact that we managed to get to this stage is also due to the fact that we have Jewish-Christian roots. So let us not forget this and realize that it was the Holocaust that was aimed at destroying these Jewish-Christian roots. But let's get back, back to us, to the present time. We are trying to make people remember the crimes against humanity, the Holocaust. I want to thank the Jewish Museum in particular, and then the teachers and students for their project called "The Disappeared Neighbors". This project is amazing. I participated in presentations of students in Telč, Třešť and Jihlava and tears welled up in my eyes when I saw what they had found out and with what strength and intensity the experiences of their predecessors and their disappeared neighbors were going through. Life is not always black and white, and we often seek for a compromise. When I go back to our Jewish-Christian roots, it becomes clear that there are clear poles, clear values. And it is not possible that in these cases we stand somewhere between the poles, somewhere between the values. We need to make ourselves clear about some things. That is why I would like to say that I do not think it is right thing to go sledding in places of reverence, be it in Lidice or Buchenwald. I believe that it is not possible and not right for someone to do their business in the way that they sell goods that bear Nazi symbols on them. I consider it exorbitant when the people, who demonstrate, for example against vaccinations, put a yellow Star of David badge on their clothes. I consider this an endless disrespect to the destiny of the people who had to wear that badge, a disgrace to their suffering. And so I come to the conclusion, to the well-known phrase, that for evil to win, it is enough for decent people to do nothing. Therefore, I ask all of you who are not yet engaged in any activity that is aimed at remembering our history, please stop doing nothing and start doing something, at least a little bit. Thank you for your attention.