

**The Address by Pavel Jelínek,
Holocaust survivor,
On the Occasion of
The Day of Holocaust Remembrance and Prevention of Crimes against Humanity
Senate of the Parliament of the Czech Republic,
January 27, 2026**

Honorable President of the Senate, esteemed survivors, distinguished guests,

I have the honor of delivering a brief speech today.

I would like to recall the Jewish community that lived in Liberec before the Second World War, and also share with you the fate of our family.

Before the war, some 1,600 Jews lived in Liberec and the surrounding towns, of whom 1,350 were members of our then-community (kehila).

After the Munich Agreement, most of them left Liberec. They moved primarily to Prague, but also to other cities. Many concluded that the German Reich could not be stopped and decided to leave Czechoslovakia altogether. Those who were fortunate obtained the necessary visas; some emigrated to what was then British Palestine. Others, however, soon joined foreign armies and fell in battle.

Those who remained in the Protectorate faced a tragic fate. Most of the Jews from Liberec were deported to the Terezín Ghetto and subsequently to other concentration camps, where they were murdered. Out of the total of 1,350, only 37 people returned after the war. Today, descendants of those who survived abroad come to Liberec quite frequently. Detailed accounts of individual life stories can be found in the book *Jews in Liberec* by Isa Engelmann. At the initiative of Kateřina Portmann from the Department of History at Liberec University, some Jews from Liberec were posthumously awarded honorary citizenship of the City of Liberec.

The Jewish Community of Liberec, of which I also served as chairman, undertook its own initiatives to honor the memory of the victims of the Holocaust. At our cemetery, which we regained ownership of after 1989, we established a Memorial to the Victims of the Shoah as part of the comprehensive reconstruction of the ceremonial hall, which during the communist era had been used as a coffee warehouse.

In this effort, we were greatly assisted by the Faculty of Architecture of the Technical University of Liberec, which at the time was led by the renowned architect Bořek Šípek. The central idea of the memorial consists of lines on the ceiling that point toward the individual tragic places where Jews from Liberec perished. These lines then continue vertically down to the ground,

where they end. Next to each vertical line are the names of the people who lost their lives at that particular site. At its base is the name of the place, along with a container holding a scroll with handwritten names, symbolically representing their grave. The lines are white, among them one blue line stands out, pointing toward Jerusalem. The author of this concept is Štěpán Gudev, a former student of the Faculty of Art and Architecture, developed under the academic guidance of Jan Stolín. This memorial design has been highly appreciated by visitors.

Another way in which we commemorate the victims of the Holocaust is through Stolpersteine. The Jewish Community of Liberec regularly installs Stolpersteine, or “stones of the disappeared,” in front of the buildings where victims of Nazism lived or worked before the war. Each year, we lay additional stones; at present, there are approximately ninety of them. I personally believe this to be an important project in the public space. I hope that we will continue placing Stolpersteine in the future, including in towns and municipalities surrounding Liberec.

And now allow me to mention the fate of our family. I was born to a Jewish mother and a Catholic father.

In 1938, like many others, we fled Liberec. Our first place of refuge was Sázava nad Sázavou, where my mother’s sister lived with her husband, Mr. Justic, who was also Jewish, and their son Zdeněk. Later, together with my grandmother, we moved to Lysá nad Labem. From there, my grandmother, Josefina Ledererová, was included in a transport to Terezin and was later murdered in Treblinka.

After a short stay in Theresienstadt, the Justic family was deported to Estonia, where they were shot together with another 888 people from Bohemia, Poland, and Germany by Estonian members of the SS units. Together with our family, we traveled there to personally honor their memory. To our astonishment, a swastika had been engraved on the memorial near the site of their murder.

In total, 23 of my other relatives were murdered during the Holocaust. After the war, only three relatives returned from the concentration camps.

Most of all, I remember my childhood friend, Hana Taussigová. She and her mother were murdered in the gas chambers in Auschwitz.

Back to my own story. Because we were too visible in Lysá nad Labem, my brother, my mother, and I were moved to Hořepník, my father’s hometown. In 1943, my mother received an order for deportation; however, my father bribed a German doctor who issued a certificate declaring her seriously ill, making her exempt from the transport. Until the end of the war, she was unable to leave the house. I, as a *Mischling*, received my transport order in April 1945. We fled to a forester’s lodge in the forest, and since the Germans were by then preoccupied with other

matters, we were liberated by the Red Army. Incidentally, I am the last surviving member of the 37 who returned to Liberec after the war.

In Liberec, we have a single synagogue, the only one in the Czech Republic built after the end of the war, as part of the so-called Reconciliation Project. The building also houses the regional library and stands on the site of the original Liberec synagogue, which was burned down during Kristallnacht.

In today's uncertain times, Liberec is essentially calm, with the exception of a recent incident when a Palestinian flag was painted on the wall of our cemetery. I believe that, with the support of the police—who always protect our synagogue during services and other events—peace will continue.

Allow me, in conclusion, to share a part of the Friday evening prayer with which we welcome Shabbat, which also serves as my life's motto:

Kol ha-olam kulo, gesher tzar me'od, ve-ha-ikar lo lefached klal.

The whole world is a very narrow bridge, and the main thing is not to be afraid at all.