

**The Address of Martin Baxa,  
Minister of Culture  
of the Government of the Czech Republic,  
on the Occasion of the Holocaust Remembrance Day  
and the Day of Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity,  
Spanish Hall, Prague Castle,  
28<sup>th</sup> January, 2025**

Your Excellency, Mr. President,  
Honorable Constitutional Officers,  
Esteemed survivors,  
Distinguished guests,

A well-known metaphor likens the Holocaust to the explosion of an atomic bomb—not merely a single moment of destruction but the result of events that preceded it, with its devastating shadow lingering for decades.

Last summer, I had the honor of representing the Czech government at the commemoration of the 81<sup>st</sup> anniversary of the prisoner uprising at the Treblinka extermination camp, where nearly 900,000 people were murdered, including over 17,000 victims from Bohemia and Moravia. I was deeply shocked to learn that only about 108,000 victims' names are known, while the vast majority remain unnamed. The Polish Foundation, Memory of Treblinka, dedicated to mapping the identities of the dead, reminds us through its motto of the vital importance of not only remembrance and reflection but also uncovering and preserving the individual fates of victims and communities. This effort is essential to bringing these individuals back into our shared memory.

At that moment, I wondered how much we truly know. Yes, we know the names of many victims—thanks to the meticulous records kept by the Protectorate authorities. But beyond that, what else?

What do we know about these individuals, their families, and the communities they came from? What do we understand about the local communities of which Czech and Moravian Jews were an integral part?

To what extent do we truly grasp the long path that led to genocide? The more than a thousand-year history of anti-Judaism, the destructive influence of pseudo-scientific racial ideology, the roles of envy and greed, and the complicity of collaboration.

And how much do we know about the Jewish experience in post-war Central and Eastern Europe? About the loneliness of survivors, empty homes, stolen property, and the indifference and unwillingness to listen. About the struggles of refugees trying to escape a transformed yet enduring anti-Semitism.

How many of us have truly asked why so many survivors chose to leave Europe, opting for the harsh conditions of the Middle East and the uncertainty of life in the newly established State of Israel over the familiar homeland of their ancestors?

How much do we understand about the profound impact of Soviet Bolshevik propaganda in discrediting the word "Zionism" and fostering the persecution of Jews in countries under Soviet rule?

We gather here today to honor the victims of the genocide of the Jews and Roma. But let us not be content with monuments, memorials, lofty words, or even our own emotions. True respect and reverence for the murdered lie in striving to genuinely understand not only the destructive mechanisms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but also in uncovering and learning about the specific fates of individual people—those who may have lived on our streets, run a shop in the village square, or attended school with our great-grandmothers.

Jaroslav Seifert, in his poem about a murdered Jewish girl, wrote: "After so many years / sometimes she comes back / but I have to be alone / and I have to hold on to my chair."

Let those dead come.

Thank you for your attention.