

**The Address of Petr Papoušek,
the Chairman of the Federation
of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic,
on the Occasion of the Holocaust Remembrance Day
and the Day of Prevention of Crimes Against Humanity,
Spanish Hall of Prague Castle,
28th January , 2025**

Dear Mr. President,
Esteemed survivors,
Distinguished guests,
Television audience,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I stand before you today with profound humility and deep reverence for the memory of the millions of innocent victims of the Holocaust. It is a great honor to address you here at Prague Castle, a place that embodies the history, power, and hope of our nation, as we solemnly commemorate the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Oświęcim concentration camp.

Eighty years ago, on 27 January 1945, Auschwitz was liberated, becoming the darkest symbol of the Nazi regime's monstrosity. Auschwitz is not merely a historical event or a place on the map; it is a warning and a solemn reminder of how far hatred, indifference, and contempt for human dignity can descend.

Today, the survivors sit among us. You are witnesses to a time we cannot—and perhaps dare not—fully imagine. Your stories not only pain us but also teach us. They teach us to cherish life, freedom, and human dignity. Above all, they remind us that evil is ever-present and requires little to grow into monstrous proportions.

The Holocaust was not merely the failure of one ideology but a profound failure of our civilization. It is a failure we must continually remind us of to combat its manifestations—be it anti-Semitism, racism, or hatred in any form.

That is why we must speak openly and courageously about what we see today. Anti-Semitism, which we once hoped was consigned to history, is re-emerging—sometimes subtly, sometimes blatantly. And let us not be mistaken—the surge in anti-Semitism was immediate following the terrorist attacks by Hamas, not a month or more afterward. Across Europe and the world, we witness a rise in hate speech, attacks on Jewish communities, and the vandalism of synagogues, cemeteries and memorial places. Conspiracy theories and hateful rhetoric are proliferating on social media, rooted in the same toxic ideologies that led to the tragedies of the 20th century. We must remember that anti-Semitism is not solely a problem for Jewish communities; it is a threat to all of society. Where hatred grows against one group, it inevitably spreads and endangers others. Hatred is like a flame that, if left unchecked, spreads uncontrollably and consumes everything in its path unless we stop it at its source.

In this context, I wish to underscore the significance of the proposed amendment to the State Citizenship Act, which would enable descendants of victims of Nazi and Communist oppression to obtain Czech citizenship. This amendment would rectify historical injustices and help restore the bonds forcibly severed from those with Czech roots. I urge all decision-makers to support this amendment and deliver justice to these families.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let us not forget that the history of Auschwitz is not only a story of unimaginable suffering but also a testament to human courage. In every survivor's story, we find resilience, bravery, and an unyielding will to live. The people, who endured the unimaginable, remind us that even in the darkest moments, light can prevail. My grandfather, Miloš Dobrý, prisoner number 170265, was one of those who faced unimaginable horrors, preserved his dignity, and contributed to the rebuilding of a democratic society after the war. His story, like so many others, serves as a profound warning and as encouragement and hope for us all.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the survivors who, despite their suffering, have rebuilt their lives and shared their testimony with future generations. Your strength and determination are a profound inspiration to all of us.

In this context, we also remember all the hostages held by Hamas terrorists and pray for their swift release.

I hope today serves not only as a reminder of the past but also as a challenge for the future—a call for responsibility, justice, and lasting peace. A call to refuse to turn a blind eye to evil and to stand against all forms of hatred, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia, wherever and whenever they arise.

“Never again” must not be an empty slogan but a solemn commitment that each of us holds in our hearts.

Yesterday, the President and I were at a memorial meeting in Auschwitz and I wrote a message to my grandparents who are no longer with us. The message was:

"Hello Grandma and Grandpa, it has been 80 years since this place was liberated. You were here for almost a year, and I cannot imagine how you survived... But because of you, we are here, and we will continue to be here, despite all our enemies, past and future. Thank you for everything. Am Israel Chai!"

Thank you.