

The Address of
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“Concert for Victims of Nazism”
organised by
Živá paměť, o.p.s./Living Memory
on the occasion
of the 65th anniversary of the end of the second World War

Prague, St. Agnes Monastery, 3rd May, 2010

Dear former concentration camp prisoners and forced labourers,
Your Excellency Ambassadors,
Honoured Guests,

This day as well as almost every single day before 65 years means and meant for us – former concentration camp prisoners and forced labourers – liberation from slave and forced labour. The end of the Second World War brought end of oppression to hidden persons and other victims of persecution too.

It was three month earlier, on the 27th January, as we remembered the day when Soviet army liberated the Concentration and extermination Camp in Auschwitz. This day is the day of terrifying memories, it is the symbolic day of those prisoners liberated from other concentration camps, it is the day of remembrance of the famous political oath of the prisoners of the concentration camp in Buchenwald in April 1945, as well as the day of remembering the heroic uprising of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto in April 1943.

We, the former prisoners of the Auschwitz concentration camp, represent the still living witnesses to an industrial killing of people of all nationalities, of all religions, and other groups of European citizens of those countries that were occupied by the German Armies in the times of World War II. The Auschwitz concentration camp thus became the biggest cemetery in the world, a cemetery of 1.5 million victims of the Nazi brutality.

The 27th January 2010 is not only the day of the 65th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp, but is also the day of the 5th anniversary of the United Nations Organization resolution to establish this day as the Holocaust Remembrance Day. This resolution was preceded by negotiations between the centre of the International Auschwitz Committee and the former Secretary General of UNO, Koffi Annan, in New York and Switzerland, and an exhibition on the Auschwitz concentration camp in the vestibule of the UNO Conference Room in New York, which was opened by Koffi Annan and co-ordinated by the centre of the International Auschwitz Committee.

On this day, we remember 6,000,000 of our Jewish fellow citizens killed, out of which 1,500,000 were children younger than 15 years of age.

We remember our parents, brothers and sisters, who were not selected to live and were sent through the fatal gate on the calm orders of the well-known SS doctor Mengele, or by other SS doctors, to be met on the other side by the gas chambers.

We remember our friends, who did not survive Auschwitz, or other concentration camps, and who died a horrible death in our arms.

We remember the human shadows, skeletons covered by skin, with eyes sunken and extinguished, with heads and legs swollen by hunger, who were only able to drag themselves on, and were forced to endure hard labour by the sticks and whips of the SS guards.

We remember the hunger and thirst that slowly shortened our lives.

We remember the friends who, out of despair, preferred to rather choose a death by electrocution on the concentration camp barbed wire fences, powered by a voltage of 22,000 V.

We remember those who resisted and organized themselves in the underground movement of concentration camps.

We remember our hatred towards our murderers and tormentors.

We also remember though, at least some of us do, the picture in our minds of a life after the end of the war, regardless of the fact of whether we would survive or not.

Today, we also remember the statesmanlike act of the former Federal President of Germany, Dr. Roman Herzog, who, following his visit to Auschwitz which left a huge impression on him, had asked the Federal Government and the Bundestag to

establish the 27th January as the public Remembrance Day in Germany some time before the UNO made this resolution.

After the war, it was very hard for us former concentration camp prisoners to think constructively and without hatred, and the change in thinking has been a long-time process in our lives. I remember the words of a former President of Israel, Chaim Herzog, on 17 October 1991 in Terezín, who proclaimed hatred as the non-constructive thinking especially troubling those who hate, and recommended these people to find positive ways of solution and thinking.

And he was right. Today, in Germany, a fourth generation has been growing up. This generation was raised in a political environment other than Nazism; nevertheless they still bear a personal guilt for something that was committed by the generation of their grandfathers. This is something that has to be emphasized to this generation, and so urge this generation to cooperate and make Europe a common land to live, a place of mutual understanding. This is something that has been happening. I am speaking from my own experiences based on many debates with the Federal President, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ministers of the Interior and the Minister of Finance. What has remained in me is my cautious suspiciousness towards the members of my generation in Germany, although this generation has been slowly departing as are we.

There is a need to lecture in German schools, as well as in the Czech ones, since these issues have not been taught to children as much. This period of time, though, constitutes an inseparable part of German history as well as Czech. It is the Mayors of German towns who invite me to give lectures in their towns, in particular those, where neo-Nazism is on the rise, and sometimes I get invitations from the Gesellschaft für Polische Bildung too. Even though the neo-Nazis also visit my lectures, I can recognize this by the clothes they wear, there has only been 2 times where I came across people of the "old" way of thinking. Once was in the grounds of the University in Würzburg, in a radical nationalistic group called Burschenschaft Alemania, where I found mutual understanding with students, but faced a total misunderstanding from the so called "old men" of my age, where the old flame of Nazi Germany has not yet burned out and probably never will. The second time this

happened was in Leipzig, where I was lecturing on the compensation process to former prisoners.

My experience is not extraordinary. I am sure it has been shared by members of the Terezín Initiative and the Auschwitz Historical Group, who give lectures in both Czech and German schools. The activities of both organizations are, to the highest extent, definitely meaningful.

This is the positive way; this is the path we shall follow in Europe.

I would like to close my speech with a quotation by Elie Wiesel:

We remember Auschwitz, all the victims, regardless of where they suffer.

We remember our hunger, to rid the world of it.

We remember our suffering, to proclaim the rights of every individual to live without fear.

I would also like to add:

Let us listen to Schiller's Ode to Joy to a tune of van Beethoven rather than the symphony of a cannonade of guns.

Thank You for Your attention

Prof. Ing. Felix Kolmer. DrSc, Vice-President of International Auschwitz-Committee

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