

DECLARATION OF RECONCILIATION AND A SHARED FUTURE

This year we will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the end of World War 2 – thus far the greatest tragedy in the history of mankind. The years 1939 – 1945 saw the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the German army and the persecution of the Czech population. After the liberation of Brno, on the basis of a resolution by the Regional National Committee dated 30th May 1945, the National Committee for Greater Brno ordered all German-speaking citizens of Brno to gather in Mendel Square at ten o'clock in the evening of that day.

During the night and early morning they were led out of the city by armed Revolutionary Guards and army units. The procession of some twenty thousand people was in for an endless march towards the Austrian border – without food, without water, without medical care, without basic sanitation, and without a moment of rest. According to eyewitness accounts, many died of exhaustion along the way, and succumbed to the epidemics that had spread throughout the camp in Pohořelice; some were beaten or shot dead by the armed escort.

This “act of revenge” was supposed to be in retaliation for Nazi crimes, however, those who had actively participated in them were affected only marginally. The campaign was directed primarily against women, children and old people, who constituted the overwhelming majority of those on the march. The number of those expelled also included many Czechs and German anti-fascists, and this act entered into the history as the “Brno Death March”.

We are well aware of the incomparably greater crimes that were committed by the Nazi regime. At the same time, we are also aware that suffering remains suffering, whoever may be its originator and whenever it may occur.

We, as members of the current political representation of the city, do condemn all crimes committed between 1939 and 1945 and, on the day of the seventieth anniversary of this event, we wish to commemorate and honour the memory of all the victims, thereby contributing to the process of reconciliation with the injustice that affected a significant section of the civilian population of Brno of that time.

We care about reconciliation and a shared future. We therefore address the former and current citizens of Brno with these messages:

The first message goes to those who were affected by violent expulsion. It is a message of reconciliation.

The second message is directed at us, the citizens of Brno today, who overwhelmingly have nothing in common with the events that took place here seventy years ago. It is not a matter of self-blame, but responsibility for the present and future coexistence of people of the most varied cultural or ethnic origin. It gives us hope that if we preserve the awareness that such acts are unacceptable, and that we are able to take an open attitude towards them, nothing like this will ever happen again. It is a message of a shared future.

The city of Brno sincerely regrets the events of 30th May 1945 and the following days, when thousands of people were forced to leave the city due to the application of the principle of collective guilt or because of the language that they used. We are well aware of not only the human tragedies, but also the cultural and social losses, that occurred at that time. We wish to express our hope that, based on the knowledge of historical events and their consequences, a repetition of similar events shall no longer be possible in Brno, and that we shall keep the events of May 1945 in our minds as a sinister memento of the past. We also express our wish that all past grievances may be forgiven and that we may, unencumbered by the past and in mutual cooperation, look forward to a shared future.