

Press Release

Forgotten Victims: International Conference on the Situation of Victims of Hate Crimes/Hate Violence and Victim Assistance in the Czech Republic

Prague, April 22, 2010

On **April 22 – 23**, a conference on the Situation of Victims of Hate Crimes/Hate Violence and Victim Assistance in the Czech Republic is taking place in Prague. The conference is held **under the auspices of the Czech Prime Minister Jan Fischer** and is organized by the **Forum 2000 Foundation**, the Foundation **“Remembrance, Responsibility and Future”** Germany (Foundation EVZ), **In IUSTITIA o.s.** and **Kulturbüro Sachsen e.V.** The conference takes place one year after Czech society was shocked by an arson attack on a Roma family, and on the eve of the trial in that case.

The conference is presenting the outcomes of the research project **“Hate Crimes – Forgotten Victims”**, which focuses on the situation of victims of hate crimes as well as victim assistance provided by non-governmental and governmental institutions. The research was conducted in the Czech Republic by Kulturbüro Sachsen e.V., In IUSTITIA o.s., Tolerance a občanská společnost and Romea o.s., and was financed by the Foundation **“Remembrance, Responsibility and Future”**.

Hate crimes are violent manifestations of intolerance that constitute a serious breach of human rights, and that have a deep impact on the victims and the communities they belong to. A hate crime could be an act of intimidation or a threat, an attack on a person or property, a murder or any other criminal offence. The term describes a concept rather than a legal definition. Hate crimes always comprise two elements: a criminal offence committed with a bias motive, which differentiates hate crimes from ordinary crimes. This means that the perpetrator intentionally chose the target of the crime because of some specific characteristic, shared by a group, such as "race", language, religion, ethnicity, nationality, or any other similar common factor. If left unaddressed, hate crimes pose a potential threat to domestic and international security, undermining social cohesion and sowing the seeds of conflict and wider-scale violence.

“The broader concept of hate violence helps to overcome a narrow view on violence which is focused only on racial or extremist violence. In the public’s mind, unfortunately, and even in government, the presumption remains that hate violence is a matter of a few dozen people, and that in the Czech Republic it is closely associated with the duality of the Roma community – the extremists. But only 10-15 percent of the perpetrators are people involved with certain racist or neo-Nazi movements. The majority of attackers are simply “ordinary” people. According to our clinics’ findings, the brutality of attacks is increasing. Especially in smaller cities, a hate crime may impair coexistence among people for a long period of time or even permanently,” says Klára Kalibová, a lawyer from the civic association In IUSTITIA.

Between 2001 and 2007, the German Foundation **“Remembrance, Responsibility and Future”** made payments to former slave and forced labourers during World War II. Among them, 76,000 Czechs received 210 Million Euro. In remembrance of the victims of National Socialism, the foundation supports projects for human rights and understanding between peoples. *„No victim of hate violence should be ignored. In Germany it took us too long to understand that the majority should not ignore attacks of hatred against minorities. Civic initiatives, such as Kulturbüro Sachsen, to assist victims of hate crime, have only appeared in the past 10 years,”* stated Dr. Martin Salm, director of the foundation.

“This conference is a great opportunity to share our expertise and the experience of Czech NGOs in dealing with hate crime with each other as well as with European partners,” says Miroslav Bohdál, Kulturbüro Sachsen e.V., co-ordinator of the project.

Issues to be discussed include the legal protection offered to victims of hate violence, the use of criminal

law instruments, the possibility for compensatory damages in criminal proceedings and civil proceedings, and the role played by victims' attorneys. The role of legislative changes, particularly in the area of criminal law, will be discussed and whether these are always changes for the better and whether they might also lead to restrictions of civil liberties.

The conference provides an opportunity for networking among Czech and international NGOs, with participants from **Germany, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Romania, Ukraine** and others.

Among the speakers of the conference are e.g.: **Alexander Verkhovsky**, SOVA-Center, Russia; **Agnieszka Mikulska**, Helsinki Foundation, Poland; **Martin Šimáček**, Director of the Agency for Social Inclusion, Czech Republic, **Kati Lang**, lawyer, RAA Sachsen e.V., Germany; **Serhiy Ponomaryov**, Gay Forum, Ukraine and Representatives of Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Poland.

For invited participants only.