



Press Statement of Martina Lehmannová, the Director of the Lidice Memorial, on her Resignation

Lidice 21 January, 2020

Several survivors of the extermination of Lidice do not like the results of an independent expert's research, as they personally concern their family members. That is why they have accused the Lidice Memorial, and me personally as its director, that we do not keep to the facts and distort facts about Lidice's history. Instead of supporting the independence of scientific knowledge and often painful coping with history, which is one of the tasks of this semi-budgetary organisation funded by the Ministry of Culture, the Minister of Culture Lubomír Zaorálek decided that my appointment as director of the Memorial should be terminated. I have eventually decided to submit my resignation myself, because I no longer have confidence in the Minister of Culture.

The Lidice Memorial as a memory institution is very specific. It commemorates a history that is still alive. Its professional work as well as popularisation activity are therefore extremely important, especially in a situation of resurgent emotive debates concerning particularly the interpretations of World War II. Targeted attempts to politicize the Lidice Memorial legacy constantly occur. Under these circumstances, the funder's support to professional work and real independence of memory institutions is all the more important.

In this delicate situation, I was taken aback by the approach of Minister of Culture Lubomír Zaorálek; on 20 January 2020, I was invited by him to a meeting and informed that I could choose between resignation and dismissal. That was the Minister's solution of a situation that arose in connection with a reportage of the Czech Television broadcast in June 2019. It included information from a material elaborated in 2015 by Vojtěch Kyncl, an employee of the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences. According to this archive material, shortly before the Lidice tragedy the mother of one of Lidice children allegedly denounced to the police her Jewish subtenant. In November 2019, some of the Lidice children-survivors responded to this reportage with an open letter announcing the termination of their cooperation with the Lidice Memorial. My standpoint in this matter, which was not, and could not be categorical toward any side of the dispute, was seen as hostile. In a letter addressed to the constitutional bodies, I and the Lidice Memorial were accused of ignorance and of distorting the facts about Lidice history. Minister of Culture Lubomír Zaorálek then had a meeting with the authors of the letter, and so did I in an effort to settle the situation.

Although I fully understand the emotions that may have been caused by this information, it is not permissible for a memory institution such as the Lidice Memorial to either immediately contest or ignore research outputs. If I have no support for this fundamental position of independence and critical thinking from the founder, I cannot continue my appointment as the director of the Lidice Memorial. Unfortunately, this approach of the Minister of Culture encourages the efforts to politicize the Lidice Memorial legacy. These are the main reasons for my resignation as on

21 January, 2020.

The Lidice Memorial is of immense importance for the Czech Republic and the world. However, the mission of the memorial is to deal with history in its full scope, critically, not rejecting discussion, even about things that are unpleasant.

If I am to recapitulate nearly three years of my work, I must say that I did the maximum possible for the Lidice Memorial. I joined the institution in 2017, when we succeeded to arrange a special four-hour programme with the Czech Television, commemorating in all dignity the 75th anniversary of the extermination of the Lidice village. This media coverage contributed, among others, to a radical increase in visitor numbers in the Memorial in that year. Together with my new team, we succeeded in launching and internationally grounding an important knowledge contest for children and youth named *Lidice for the 21st Century*. The competition enhances knowledge of history and critical thinking. Besides children from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, it was attended by children from Poland last year, and this year it is expanding to German-speaking countries. I also managed to develop and establish contacts with similar museums and memorials around the world and in the Czech Republic. The high-quality collection of contemporary international art was enlarged with new acquisitions. We have taken the first steps to register the unique collection of works awarded within the Lidice International Children's Exhibition of Fine Arts in the Central Register of Collections at the Ministry of Culture. We also focused on the long-neglected issue of land ownership in the reverent area.

I am and will remain proud of my work for the Lidice Memorial.

Mgr. Martina Lehmannová
Resigning director of the Lidice Memorial