April 1, 2014

His Excellency Bohuslav Sobotka
Prime Minister
Prague, Czech Republic

Dear Mr. Prime Minister:

On behalf of B'nai B'rith International's more than 200,000 members and supporters in over 50 countries, we write to express our deep disappointment over comments by Justice Minister Helena Valkova concerning the Holocaust in Czechoslovakia. Her claim that, "Not that much happened" during the Nazi occupation of the country shocked and saddened us, as it clearly minimized the tragic loss of tens of thousands of Czech Jews.

In 1936, Czechoslovakia was home to an entire B'nai B'rith district, with 16 different lodges and 1,800 members. Tragically, about 80,000 Czech Jews – the vast majority of the community – were killed in the Holocaust. Between 1941 and 1945, 46,000 Jews were deported from Prague alone; only 5,000 survived.

Mr. Prime Minister, we are living in an era when the number of living Holocaust survivors is dwindling and Holocaust revisionism and anti-Semitism are on the rise. We fear that remarks like Minister Valkova's present a special danger, as they inevitably diminish an epic historical tragedy. The power of the Holocaust to warn current and future generations about the importance of confronting evil is unparalleled. Language that effectively trivializes that episode can only desensitize the public to the Holocaust example and erode its unique lessons.

B'nai B'rith hopes that your government will publicly apologize for Minister Valkova's comments and recommit itself to the priorities of Holocaust education and commemoration. We thank you for your attention and cooperation and look forward to remaining in communication with you on this and other issues of mutual interest in the near future.

Respectfully,

Allan J. Jacobs
President

Daniel S. Mariaschin
Executive Vice President