

STATEMENT BY THE STAFF OF THE TEREZIN INITIATIVE INSTITUTE ON THE DISMISSAL OF DIRECTOR TEREZA ŠTĚPKOVÁ

During the meeting of the Board of Directors and the Supervisory Board of the Terezín Initiative Institute (ITI) on 30 June 2021, the director of the ITI, Mgr. Tereza Štěpková, was removed from office.

We, the staff of ITI, **disagree with and oppose this decision** and consider it manipulated for the following reasons:

- The dismissal of the director was decided by a Board of Directors appointed in April this year, which met only twice before it decided on the dismissal. Moreover, four of the six members of the Board of Directors were newly appointed, and we seriously doubt that two months were a sufficient time frame for the new Board members to familiarise themselves with the activities of our institution and to be fully able to evaluate whether Štěpková was performing her duties as director incorrectly or not.
- No reason was given as to why the ITI's director was removed with an hour's notice, other than "a series of problems and blockades in communication during the efforts to return the direction of the Institute to its mission as stated in its founding charter" (quoted from P. Štingl's letter to staff dated 1 July 2021)
- We declare that the activities we carry out in the organization to the best of our knowledge and conscience, fulfil the mission given in the charter; this is proven, among other things, by the fact that under the leadership of T. Štěpková, ITI has become a recognized institution in the Czech Republic and abroad, has succeeded in obtaining grants and subsidies, and has created a wide network of domestic and foreign partner institutions.
- The negotiations of the two most recent Boards of Directors and Supervisors, which focused only on selected aspects of the ITI's work, namely the reading of Roma names at the Yom Ha-Shoah event, and on finding fault with the work of the Director and the entire organization, have led in recent months to uncertainty among the staff, which threatens and to some extent paralyzes our further work. Repeated offers to come and present our activities in person to the Board of Directors have passed unheeded, which we consider very unfortunate and contrary to what the mission of the Board of Directors of a public benefit corporation should be.

Considering the areas that the ITI is dedicated to - i.e. research, education, Holocaust remembrance, combating discrimination, anti-Semitism and racism, and strengthening competencies for a democratic culture - it is against our conscience to remain silent after the dismissal of the director and its subsequent media coverage on behalf of a non-existent "ITI press service". At the same time, we declare that our actions are not directed against the person of the newly appointed director, Mr. Martin Thiel, whom we did not have time to get to know because he took leave soon after his appointment.

With respect to these facts, **we request:**

- Revocation of the decision to dismiss Tereza Štěpková from the position of ITI director and the announcement of a proper selection tender for this position.
- The resignation of the members of the ITI board, including its chairman, Pavel Štingl, who has failed to resolve the tensions between the Terezín Initiative and the ITI since he took office in October 2020. Instead, he has put the ITI leadership in an unresolvable situation and caused a further escalation of tensions. In the event that the Board does not resign, we ask the founders - the Terezín Initiative - to remove its members. We reasonably believe that the current Board is not working in accordance with its mission, which is primarily to ensure the development of the organization, and is not fulfilling its duty, the exercise of which requires sufficient information about the mission and services of the organization before any actions that directly affect the Institute's operations are taken.
- The appointment of two members to the new Board of Directors, who have an employment relationship with the ITI, which is in accordance with the ITI Charter – based on our experience to today, this is the only way, that the Board of Directors can fulfil its mission adequately, and the Board of Directors will gain a much better insight into the work of the ITI. This way the institution will no longer be decided about by people who are not familiar with ITI's operations, its staff, and activities.
- We request that a mediator will be hired to resolve the conflict between TI as founder and ITI; the conflict has been in the background of all board deliberations and has resulted in an inability to communicate constructively with the director and staff of the organization.

To discuss our demands, we ask for a meeting with the founder, the Terezín Initiative, before 23 July 2021. In the event that it will be impossible to agree on a solution, we are prepared to resign collectively in the last resort, with all the consequences that this will entail for us personally, for the organisation, for the Board of Directors and for the founder.

We believe that together we can find a way out of this difficult situation. However, we can only achieve this through direct negotiation, straightforward communication and mutual cooperation. We value our work very much and do not want to jeopardize it. We would like to thank Tereza Štěpková for the way she has led ITI so far, not only in terms of content and activities, but also in relation to us, the staff.

Prague, 8 July 2021

Ing. Arch. Dana Gabařová Mgr. Aneta Plzáková, Mgr. Radana Rutová, Mgr. Michal Schuster, Mgr. Marie Smutná, Mgr. Peter Sokol, Mgr. Eliška Waageová