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# Charles University Pays Tribute to Self-Sacrifice of the 'Burning Man'

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On Friday, January 16th 2015, the Faculty of Arts of Charles University hosted the culmination of a series of commemorative events to honour the 46th anniversary of the self-immolation of protesting student Jan Palach.

Throughout the week of the anniversary of Jan Palach's death, the Student Council of the Faculty of Arts organised a series of public events on the theme of Jan Palach's depictions in art, including a speech by film critic Jan Kolář on the commemorative films 'Jan 69' and 'Burnt.' Kolář notes that Jan Palach's memory lives on within the Czech culture as a significant event symbolising the hope for change. Palach's shocking sacrifice is believed to this day by many to have represented the struggle against repression, and the image of the 'burning man' continues to serve as an emblem of hope for those fighting against authoritarian regimes.

Attendees to the event on Thursday 15th of January witnessed examples of Jan Palach in literature and photography, and the Czech Centre of PEN International announced they will once again hold a literary competition for high school students in honour of Jan Palach. Friday's commemorative ceremony at the dedicated plaque in memory of Jan Palach at the Faculty of Arts building was attended by a number of press organisations as well as the public, university staff and students who turned out to pay tribute to the bravery of a young man who found himself in desperation under oppressive rule in 1969. This ceremony was hosted by CU Rector Professor Tomáš Zima, Dean of the Faculty of Arts Mirjam Friedová, Chairman of the Academic Senate of the Faculty of Arts Jan Čermák, Vice-President of the Student Union Sára Vidímová and President of the Student Council of the Faculty of Arts Eva Marková.

Rector Tomas Zima noted in his speech: *'I believe that Jan Palach belongs amongst the most prominent of those who fought against the authoritative communist regime in Czechoslovakia. We should also remember, in the face of his self-sacrifice, that freedom and democracy are not a certainty and we can lose them easier than we may think.'*

Jan Palach was not indifferent to the turmoil within his own country – indeed, he was an advocate of action to bring about and inspire change. Those who continue to honour Jan Palach's sacrifice are those praised for their commemoration by the Rector. Mr Zima praised those citizens who, in modern Czech society where we take fundamental freedoms and rights for granted, remain aware of the fragility of human liberty when recalling past struggles for a democratic nation. The speeches were evocative and humbling. In true Czech fashion many candles were lit and flowers laid at the plaque to ensure the self-sacrifice of the 'burning man' 46 years ago is not easily forgotten.

Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Associate Professor Mirjam Friedová, summarised the very reason why it is important and even crucial to continue to respect Jan Palach's selfless reason for his immolation: *'He had only one aim, no less than to show that it is necessary and possible to stand against cowardice, conformism and hypocrisy with one's personal bravery and sense of responsibility... He wanted to show us how significant it is to put your faith in goodness against evil. It is necessary to actively stand against evil so that it does not win.'*