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# US Ambassador Norman Eisen Uncovers Records of His Czechoslovak Ancestors

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On Wednesday, March 23, 2011, the US Ambassador Norman Eisen paid a visit to the Malach Visual History Centre at the Charles University Faculty of Mathematics and Physics. The director of the Institute of Formal and Applied Linguistics of the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics and founder of the Malach Centre, Prof. RNDr. Jan Hajič, Dr., told Mr Eisen about the Centre's history as well as the archive containing 52,000 interviews with Holocaust survivors.

The history of this encounter began earlier this year when the US Ambassador assumed office. "There were a number of coincidences. On January 28, Mr Eisen officially presented his credentials to President Václav Klaus. On that very day we marked the first anniversary of the Malach Visual History Centre at the Faculty," Professor Hajič says. During the same week, the US Embassy contacted the faculty so there was an opportunity to present this unique international project to the new ambassador.

His Excellency Norman Eisen and his team arrived at the faculty premises on Malostranské náměstí exactly at 1 pm and stayed for more than an hour. First of all Mr. Eisen was shown round the faculty library and study hall and then tried working with one of the computers to see for himself how the whole archive worked. Mr. Eisen said he was very happy to find many records connected with his family's former places of residence – his mother Frieda, survivor of the Auschwitz death camp, was born in former Czechoslovakia.

The ambassador welcomed the fact that the unique archive is now accessible in the Czech Republic, his country of assignment, and pointed out that the existence of the archive and its potential for research not only in the field of history and linguistics are "fascinating". He also expressed interest in the future of the project – whether further testimonies would be archived as valuable survivors' testimonies still exist that have yet to be recorded.

## **About the Malach Visual History Centre**

*The Malach Visual History Centre ( <http://ufal.mff.cuni.cz/cvhm> ) is an access point to the large digital archive of the USC Shoah Foundation Institute. The archive contains almost 52,000 testimonies from Holocaust survivors and witnesses (lasting 2 hours on average) that had been recorded during the 1990s in 56 countries and 32 languages. The archive is accessible through an online interface that enables users to search and watch testimonies according to their specific interest, using an index containing 55,000 different keywords. More than 500 interviews are available in Czech.*

*Its premises in the Library of the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics on Malostranské náměstí 25 provide six independent workstations and seat 12 researchers or members of the public who can work with the interview archive. The user interface is easy and intuitive yet sufficiently sophisticated. Besides individual work, the capacity and arrangement of the Malach Centre also allows organized group visits of up to 20 members, for example by specialized student seminars from high schools and universities. If you would like to visit the Malach VHC, you can do so any time during its opening hours (see the website above) or write to [malach@knihovna.mff.cuni.cz](mailto:malach@knihovna.mff.cuni.cz)*

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