

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to introduce to you the Firefighters Association of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, which is the largest special interest organisation in the Czech Republic. At the beginning of this year, we had 347,536 members in 7780 brigades.

Our most important activity is preparing members and their work in fire rescue units, of which there are a total of 7,230 with 69,694 volunteer firefighters. Last year, our members were deployed to 112,281 incidents, during which they saved or evacuated 47,708 people from life-threatening premises, chiefly during the June floods.

The floods affected the greatest number of municipalities in history: 971. The involvement of more than 15,000 volunteer firefighters in emergency events could be felt in each affected location. Our involvement in the floods demonstrated our preparedness, determination and indispensability. Not only unit members, but also other capable volunteer firefighters took part in the emergencies.

This summer, firefighters again had their hands full. The whims of the weather tested the preparedness of firefighters for all types of extraordinary events in quick succession. Often firefighters were extinguishing extensive fires in fields and meadows in one location, yet a few dozen kilometres away their colleagues were busy with chainsaws cutting down trees that had fallen onto roads during storms and then heading out to pump water out of flooded cellars or to reinforce dams.

We pay close attention not only to repression, but also prevention, especially in the area of protection of the population. Being prepared for extraordinary events is extremely important – this applies to both firefighters and the public. Voluntary firefighters understand this perfectly and prepare themselves in a sophisticated professional training system, which is offered to them in two central firefighting schools: one in Janské Koupele and the other in Bílé Poličany. The Firefighting Movement Centre in Přebyslav also provides special training. Here fire chiefs, engine drivers and others develop expertise in the field. Chainsaw operators, public safety lecturers and technicians, respiratory equipment operators, youth leaders and others undergo training here. Interested individuals can also register for courses such as working in heights, basic medical knowledge, working on water, and emergency rescue on ice, or obtain a licence to operate small boats. The University for Volunteer Firefighters has become very popular, and the Junior University opened its doors

recently. Both universities are operating in close cooperation with the Technical University of Ostrava. The special training courses there take place under the auspices of the Fire Rescue Service of the Czech Republic.

We publish a range of educational material. We have published a series of technical manuals – “Firefighters in the Theatre”, “Firefighters and Chimneys” and “Firefighters for Municipalities in Need” – to contribute to the general knowledge of all members of the Firefighters Association of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. We are currently drafting the manual entitled “Firefighters Advising Seniors”.

Seniors, children and youth are the groups that we are focusing on in particular. We organise meetings and lectures at schools and other educational facilities, senior citizens' homes and special care homes in municipalities of all sizes.

It is encouraging to hear that there are 94,056 young firefighters up to 26 years old, including 47,685 children and youth aged 6-18 years. We are thus preparing the best future volunteer firefighters that we could possibly hope for. These young people also know how to present their excellent sporting abilities at competitions not only at home but also abroad.

This June, we were the organisers of the Fifth Annual World Youth Championships and the Second Annual World Junior Championships in Fire Sport in the town of Svitavy, where we defended the title of absolute world junior champions earned last year in Podolsk, Russia. We were pleased to have managed the organisation of these championships without any major complications, but even more exciting is that six records were broken, three of them by young Czech firefighters.

Camps are also popular. In addition to dozens of summer camps, international firefighting youth camps are well renowned. Educational activities, such as summer schools for instructors, are also excellent. Regular meetings of groups but also thousands of public events for unorganised children and youth organised by volunteer firefighters in their respective municipalities take place year round.

We secure free time, sporting and educational activities for our young members and their leaders not only from our own funds, but also through the generous support of the Ministry of Youth, Education and Sport. Volunteer work in this area is also highly appreciated.

Our young athletes have presented us well in last year's Firefighting Olympics in Mulhouse, France, which has literally become a medal harvest for our



representatives. In competition with twenty-six countries, we again proved that we – both youth and adults – are the world's number one in fire sport disciplines.

Fire sport enjoys great support in this country and tens of thousands of our members are actively involved. Each year we organise the national championships in fire sport for youth and adults in traditional CTIF disciplines and this year also in TFA disciplines. Plamen (Flame), the national children and youth fire sport competition, has been held for more than forty years. Last year, we brought home eleven gold, thirteen silver and eleven bronze medals from the world championships.

We place a lot of time and effort into our traditions. This year in particular we had a great opportunity for this. We organised a whole series of events to commemorate the first Czech volunteer fire brigade which was founded on 22 May 1864 in the royal town of Velvary near Prague. Celebrations took place not only in this town, but also in Litoměřice in the form of the Firefighting Festival, which became a huge exhibition of well-preserved historical equipment. We also organised the seventh annual historical promotional drive of our association. Each year we drive through different regions. This year our convoy was again international: we travelled through the Liberec Region, with excursions to Zittau, Germany, and Bogatynia, Poland. The biggest event of course was the Fourth Annual Gathering of Firefighters and Firefighting Vehicles Pyrocar 2014, which took place in Přebyslav in the last weekend of August. Here one could see 340 pieces of modern equipment and 40 pieces of historical equipment presented by 58 exhibitors.

We are a long-term organiser of meetings of the International Study Group for the History of the Fire Service and the Fire Protection under CTIF. Last year, the meeting was held for the twenty-first time at the Firefighting Movement Centre in Přebyslav. The Czech Republic has a number of firefighting museums and honours its former firefighters. Collectors are also active in this country.

Volunteer firefighters are also folk tradition bearers. For example, the Mardi Gras parade, which is organised each year of the Volunteer Firefighters Association in Studénka in the Hlinecko region, is in fact on the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage list.

Our mission is fulfilled continuously, even though our greatest wish is that no one will ever be in danger and that no one will ever need us. Of course, reality is different and volunteer firefighters are a necessity. They enjoy support from society, family and friends. No one can reasonably doubt their benefit and importance.

Firefighters do not expect any thanks, although they would certainly deserve it. Nevertheless, in conclusion I can do little else but give my sincerest "thank you" – to all who, for the last 150 years, have served here and who continue to serve their fellow citizens in all the fire stations in our beautiful country.