

PRESS RELEASE

Exhibition: **FAMILY HAPPINESS**
Location: Information and Culture Centre NTM,
Nostický Palace, Ministry of Culture
Maltézské Square, Prague

Opening: **Tue 21. 4. 2009, 6 PM**
Date: 22. 4. 2009 - 10. 5. 2009

Press conference: **Tue 21. 4. 2009, 1 PM**
The Parliament of Czech Republic,
Sněmovní 4, Prague 1



The press conference will be attended by politicians, members of the NGO Life Together and the families whose children were removed from homes and placed in state child care institutions. Part of the press conference will be a performance by Tamara Moyzes realised in cooperation with these families.

The contemporary art exhibition **Family Happiness** is a comment on forced removal of children from their homes and their placing in state childcare institutions. At this exhibition, organised by an NGO Life Together in cooperation with the National Technical Museum, over 20 Czech, Slovak and international artists will show their works that critically reflect on the problem of the forced removal and address the crippling effect these official interventions have upon the family relations. Furthermore these works raise the issue of (in)complete families in a wider political, social and cultural context. The exhibition takes place in the Information and Culture Centre of the National Technical Museum in Nostický palace on Maltézské square. It will present videos, objects, installations, prints, photographs and comics.

The initiator of the project and one of the exhibiting artists, Tamara Moyzes comments on the project: "I have been working with the Roma for several years, on artistic as well as activist projects. The NGO Life Together asked me to create an art work dedicated to this theme. I had the idea to put together a larger exhibition and to raise awareness of this problem in an unusual way." Tamara Moyzes exhibits videos and prints that were created in cooperation with the families harmed by the forced removal of their children.

The majority of the exhibiting artists has been consistently employing political and social themes in their work. Also presenting her work at the exhibition is a famous Serbian artist Tanja Ostojić who through her art often comments on racist thinking within European politics.

"We think that contemporary art can become a platform for political discussions on hot issues. Art shouldn't be perceived solely as a aesthetical phenomenon. Its scope is far wider. We are happy that the exhibition takes place in the ministry building as its theme tackles the policy of the state," explain the curators of the exhibition Lenka Kukurová and Zuzana Štefková.

The organiser of the exhibition is an NGO **Life Together** that has been involved in a program of prevention of the forced removal of children from socially disadvantaged families and their placement in institutional care. Besides of the field work, the NGO specializes in spreading information on the problem and the legal counselling. "Frequently the general public voices out the opinion that the best place to rear a child is its family and not a materially well equipped child care institution in that the children grow up like in a 'greenhouse' and that does not prepare them for the real life. I believe that this exhibition will be another impulse for the lay public as well as for the political representatives," stresses the chairman of the NGO Kumar Vishwanathan.

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More information at: www.rodinnapohoda.cz, www.vzajemnesouziti.cz

Exhibiting artists:

Darina Alster (CZ), Radovan Čerevka (SK), Pavlína Fichta Čierna (SK), Milena Dopitová (CZ), Kateřina Fojtíková (CZ), Laďa Gažiová (SK), Anežka Hošková (CZ), Shlomi Yaffe (IL), Gabriela Jurkovičová (CZ), Lenka Klodová (CZ), Jana Kochánková (CZ), Tomáš Makara (SK), Tamara Moyzes (SK), Tanja Ostojić (SER/DE), Pavla Sceranková (SK), Michal Šiml (CZ), Jana Štěpánová (CZ), TOY_BOX (CZ), Silvie Vondřejcová (CZ), Richard Wiesner (CZ), Dušan Zahoranský (SK), Kateřina Závodová (CZ)

Story of V. family:

The protagonists of this story are Mr. and Mrs. V., a mixed Roma-Czech marriage, and their two sons – Milan and Adam, who are now 5 and 7 years old. The first son was born when Mrs. V. had just turned 18, his father is Mr. V who has Slovak nationality. The parents and their son shared an apartment with Mrs. V.'s mother in a Roma ghetto in the suburbs of a smallish town. Adam was born prematurely and since his birth he was both mentally and physically handicapped. He went through many specialist examinations and rehabilitations. The family decided to move to Slovakia and live together with Mr. V.'s relatives. Unfortunately, both the mother and her son have Czech nationality and in Slovakia they had to pay for their health care. To buy expensive special food for Adam who suffers from intolerance of cow's milk or to continue his rehabilitation became impossible for the family. Eventually the children were forcibly removed from the family and placed in institutional care. Mr. and Mrs V. but more so their children were punished for the mistake they made but the Czech state is also partially responsible. It did not offer the young mother with a handicapped child a sufficient support, professional assistance and advice. It did not help her finding a permanent accommodation. With the younger child the family didn't even get the chance to prove that it would be capable of taking care of him. The children were separated from one another and they practically don't know each other. The contact of both parents with their children was considerably limited due to operating rules of the childcare institution. For a long period of time children were not allowed to stay at their parents' home because of mildew occurrence in the bathroom or use of heating for solid fuels. Both the court and the social and legal child protection authority always rather sought for reasons why not to return the children to their home than ways how to support the family. More importance was given to the proficiency of the institutional care than to emotional relationships and family relations. Although the parents can succeed and get the children back, the boys will always be marked by the years spent in child care institutions.

Facts about the problem:

The removal of children from homes is a wide spread practice in the Czech Republic even if the evidence supported by field work suggests that this procedure leads to the break down of the families, the destruction of children's emotional ties and problems with their socialization. The number of children raised in the anonymous and thus pathological environment of institutional childcare in the Czech Republic is alarming (60 out of each 10 000 children under the age of 3). Recent comparison between the EU countries show that the number of children under the age of 3 placed in institutional care in the Czech Republic is several times higher than in the comparable European states. From the 33 European countries the number of children under the age of 3 placed in institutional care is the highest in the Czech Republic (according to a research of prof. Kevin Brown from University of Birmingham realised between 2003-2005). Concurrently, more than a half of children are placed in the institutional care because of the difficult situation of their families and another third because of health related problems. A large number of these children is of Roma origins. The majority of children placed in the institutional care are not orphans or victims of domestic violence or abuse, but children from poor families. The placing of a child into the institutional care by the state authorities responsible for social and legal protection of children is an abrupt solution of a problem that could be remediable by an intense cooperation with the endangered family through support, assistance, exercise, remedial classes etc. Unfortunately, this is far beyond the capacity of the overburdened state social workers. The network of services supporting the families is insufficient and the cooperation between the state and NGOs evolves very slowly.

Thanks to:

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