Statements of Charles University on the shooting at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University

We mourn the loss of life of members of our university community, express our deepest condolences to all the bereaved and are thoughts with all those affected by this tragedy. We are aware that these events are complex and compounded, and we again extend our condolences to all those whose hearts have been broken by the loss of loved ones.

Charles University enters the New Year with head held high (04. 01. 2024, 18.30)

The management of Charles University (CU) and the Faculty of Arts of Charles University hereby provides the latest summary of the situation and coming steps over the course of January.

Main building

The main building of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University on Jan Palach Square will remain closed until at least the end of January 2024. The reasons are mainly technical condition of the building after the tragedy, including the police intervention to secure the site. There was damage to equipment, the destruction of more than 130 doors and there is a need to secure administrative materials and internal documents. This means it is not yet possible to resume normal operations. Many repairs also require a specific technical approach. The management of the Faculty of Arts, in cooperation with CU management, has already initiated the necessary repairs or preparations to commission major repairs. A gradual (partial) re-opening of the building is expected with the start of the spring semester.

Classes

Classes at the Faculty of Arts are cancelled until the end of the fall semester, i.e. January 12, 2024. The spring semester at the faculty will start according to the original schedule of the academic year on February 19, 2024. It is possible that some classes will be partially (especially initially) replaced by individual or online meetings. However, it is envisaged that teaching will be distributed in the spring semester to all buildings used by the Faculty of Arts, including the main building. Here, the process may be phased according to the accessibility of the spaces undergoing renovation. The exception will be the 4th floor of the main building, which is likely to remain closed for the entire spring semester. The opening of this floor is planned for the beginning of the new academic year 2024/2025. A permanent memorial is being considered for this floor.

The Faculty of Arts will be accommodating to students in fulfilling their study obligations, e.g. in terms of deadlines for fulfilling study obligations, who will also be able to use individual study plans. Specific information will be provided to students by the lecturers and/or the management of the relevant department of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University.

Security, now and into the future

Charles University did not and does not take security conditions lightly. In 2020, a security analysis was launched covering a total of 189 buildings belonging to the university - i.e. its faculties, dormitories, canteens and other university buildings. This was completed in 2022. Appropriate individual recommendations were gradually implemented, but wider and faster implementation was - and is - entirely dependent on available funding. For universities (as opposed to regional education), there was and is no subsidy related to the protection of soft targets. Nevertheless, CU will try to implement other appropriate measures in 2024, within the limits of possibility, e.g. an expansion of the early warning system, extension of training on behaviour of persons in crisis situations, strengthening of the central security line, revision of staffing in buildings or deepening cooperation with the emergency services and other organisations, especially in the field of security.
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The University is still calling on everyone if they feel any need for psychological help to use it - it is offered not only by the CU (information can be found here), but also by the free crisis line of the Police of the Czech Republic: +974 823 158. Please do not hesitate to ask for help.
Although the UK management (the UK Central Crisis Staff) has received a number of urgings in recent hours to publish the list of names of the victims of Thursday's tragic shooting, it hereby declares that it will not publish the names, especially for reasons of remembrance. This is not only an agreement with the Czech Police, but also to protect the personal data of the victims.

Charles University is grateful for the support and cohesion of the entire university community and the words of comfort from the general public that have come not only from the Czech Republic but from all over the world. We are also grateful for the financial support that comes from hundreds of donors to the CU Endowment Fund, which currently totals more than CZK 30 million. The UK will decide and transparently inform about the specific steps of spending the Endowment Fund (for obvious reasons only at the beginning of 2024).

The management of Charles University welcomes the opening of debates on the strategy of security at universities and is ready to actively participate in it, as well as the convening of a meeting of rectors with the Minister of the Ministry of Education, representatives of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic and the Czech Police, where the aim will (hopefully) be the creation of a joint strategy to ensure the security of universities and standards of security in buildings.

We greatly appreciate and thank all those who are doing their part to help resolve the situation and find ways to cope with the current situation. We would like to thank all the volunteers, all those involved from the Dean's Office of the Faculty of Arts, the Rector's Office, students of the Faculty of Arts and all other faculties, as well as all the people who help selflessly and willingly with good will. This work also helps us all to cope with this terrible tragedy.

The management of the University, together with the management of the Faculty of Arts, reiterates its unceasing regret and sorrow for the lives lost and for the losses that have been indelibly etched in the souls of us all. We extend our heartfelt condolences to all the survivors, families and friends of the victims.

Charles University will continue to provide organizational, material and psychological support to all those in need in the coming days, while at the same time striving to ensure a peaceful return to campus for all those affected. Charles University and our society will never again be the same as we knew it until the tragic afternoon of December 21, 2023. Our thoughts are with you all in these difficult Christmas times marked by pain and loss. Thank you for being with us during this difficult time.

CU Central Crisis Staff

(Prague, December 23, 2023, 17.00)

Charles University informs about the current situation and thanks for the expressions of support (22. 12. 2023, 14.30)

Charles University held a memorial service today (December 22) in front of the main entrance to the Carolinum building at Ovocný trh in Prague, honoring the victims of the shooting at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. Charles University's leadership including rector Milena Králičková, dean of the Faculty of Arts Eva Lehečková, the leadership of the Faculty of Philosophy, and representatives of the Czech Rectors' Conference, laid wreaths at the memorial site. Many other public figures participated in this memorial service, including the Prime Minister Petr Fiala, ministers of the Czech government, ambassadors, members of the academic community, and the general public.

Since last night, Charles University has been actively cooperating in analyzing the situation with soft target protection expert Zdeněk Kalvach. Soft targets refer to places with a high concentration of people and, by nature, usually difficult to secure. These places are vulnerable to unexpected violent attacks, such as the one faced by innocents at the Faculty of Arts, on Thursday, December 21, 2023, in the afternoon.

Currently, the building of the Faculty of Arts remains inaccessible. The police have handed the building over to the university, but so far, only security staff and technicians who are assessing the building's condition and damage have been allowed in. Personal belongings are currently not permitted to be retrieved from the building. As soon as there is a change in this matter, and it becomes possible to retrieve items, Charles University will inform everyone immediately.

The leadership of the Faculty of Arts has declared a dean's holiday until January 2, 2024.

The Charles University Endowment Fund has launched a collection to support the families of the victims and also faculty, staff, and students affected by the shooting at the Faculty of Arts. Charles University greatly appreciates the support that victims receive from Czech and foreign institutions, companies, and individuals through the Endowment Fund. The fund's collection currently exceeds 16 million CZK (over $700 000), with more contributions promised. The use of these funds will be coordinated with the leadership of the Faculty of Arts. Thank you all!

On Friday, December 22, 2023, at 19:30, an ecumenical service for the victims of the shooting at the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University will take place in the Church of the Holy Salvator (Křižovnická 4) in Prague and will be led by Msgr. prof. Tomáš Halík. On Saturday, December 23, 2023, at 11:00, a requiem for the victims of the shooting in the St.
Vitus Cathedral will be held. The event is organized by the Prague Archbishopric and the Prague Castle. On Saturday, December 23, 2023, at 15:00, an ecumenical prayer will take place in the church of St. Martina ve zdi (Martinská 8, Prague) to hold a moment of silence for the victims of the shooting at the Faculty of Arts of the Charles University.

The leadership of Charles University and the Faculty of Arts are currently addressing a large number of suggestions and inquiries related to the situation. Even with enormous efforts to respond promptly, quick reactions cannot be guaranteed at this time.

We kindly ask everyone, especially the media, to approach the topic of death and the families of the deceased with sensitivity and to give them the necessary peace in which they can mourn. Thank you.

We keep the families of the deceased and injured in our thoughts.

Leadership of Charles University and the Faculty of Arts
(Prague, December 22, 2023, 14.30)

Statement of Rector of Charles University and Dean of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University on the shooting at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University (21. 12. 2023, 23.00; updated 22. 12. 10.00)

Dear colleagues, dear students,

In connection with the tragic events that took place at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University on December 21, 2023, in which lives were lost and many people were badly injured, we, together with the management of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, express our deepest condolences to all the bereaved families who lost loved ones. Our thoughts are equally with those who are now fighting to survive in hospital and their families.

We would also like to take this opportunity to express our deepest gratitude to all those who have contributed to preventing a more significant loss of life, to the components of the integrated rescue system, and to all the medical and paramedics who are now caring for our injured in hospitals.

As tragic as the attack on Thursday was and as terrible a shock it is, it is important to point out that there is no evidence that it was of ethnic or racial origin.

We are aware that this extreme and dire situation has severely affected not only the entire academic community of Charles University but the broader public and also shocked many people abroad. Therefore, Charles University is now offering all of its students and staff an extended spectrum of support in the form of psychological assistance at its counseling centers and outside of Charles University.

From the very first moment, the management of Charles University, as well as the management of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University, in cooperation with the security forces, dealt with the situation within the framework of a quickly established crisis staff. It also recommended cancelling all university events on Friday (December 22, 2023), including classes, for reasons of commemoration. A commemorative site has been set up at the Carolinum (Ovocný trh 3, Prague) by the fountain, a typical meeting place for students and staff. People began lighting candles there on Thursday night.

The Charles University Foundation has also announced a collection to support the families of the victims, teachers, and students affected by the shooting at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University. You can donate HERE.

The level of violence that took place today at Charles University is absolutely uncharted territory and shocking for our academic community and for the Czech Republic. Let us, therefore, stand together in these difficult moments. We ask everyone to try to remain calm and composed, and we again express our condolences to all those whose hearts have been broken by the loss of loved ones.

We are with you all at this difficult time, and thank you very much for your support so far and in the future.

On behalf of the entire administration of Charles University and the Faculty of Arts of Charles University

Milena Králíčková, Rector of Charles University
Eva Lehečková, Dean of the Faculty of Arts of Charles University
(Prague, December 21, 2023, 23.00; updated 22. 12. 10.00)
There are and will be networks of contacts for HELP lines (psychological help), e.g. a crisis chat is currently running where support is provided from trained psychologists - crisis interventionists and crisis and psychological support and help.

We mourn the loss of life of members of our university community, express our deepest condolences to all the bereaved and our thoughts are with all those affected by the tragedy. We now ask everyone to try to remain calm and composed, and we again extend our condolences to all those whose hearts have been broken by the loss of loved ones.

Further information will follow shortly in view of the constantly evolving situation.

Charles University Management
(Prague, December 21, 2023, 18.10)