

PRESS RELEASE

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Advocating for a chance to get a job for people with criminal past, Justice Minister Robert Pelikán participates in the Yellow Ribbon Run charity relays

Have you ever seen a minister teamed up with convicted prisoners at the starting line of a major running race? If you don't wish to miss this look, come and join us at the Yellow Ribbon Run taking place as part of the O2 Prague Relay 4x5 2017 on June, 14 in Stromovka, Prague. Minister Robert Pelikán will hit the track first out of his four-member team for a total of 20 kilometers.

After running five kilometers, minister Pelikán will hand off the baton to the next runner, Maria, who currently serves her sentence in the Světlá nad Sázavou Prison. Their team will be complemented by Václav, a former convict and the Prison Service Deputy Head Simon Michailidis.

Minister Pelikán supports the Yellow Ribbon Run project, which promotes the idea of a second chance for those prisoners who have served their punishment, and struggle to start a new life. Importantly, securing a job is one of the key factors that helps each ex-convict to reintegrate back into society. However, it might turn very difficult for people with criminal records to actually find work.

"The shock of living a life after prison can be too much for many ex-offenders. Out of the blue, they are again fully responsible for all their actions. In addition to this, they struggle with prejudices that often make it hard for them to find a job. Every individual ex-prisoner's effort to overcome this critical period and succeed in living life after prison deserves praise," said minister Pelikán, adding: *"We must advance public awareness and acceptance of reintegrating ex-offenders into society. That's why I like to participate in this year's Yellow Ribbon Run and to help the Czech society escape prejudices."*

According to experts, prejudices might ruin ex-convicts' prospect of getting a job. Last year, 10,271 people were released from Czech prisons. And numbers say that more than two-thirds of Czech companies require background checks when recruiting. Moreover, 55 percent of employers never employ people with a criminal record. Actually only a third of ex-offenders motivated to work really succeed in securing a job. That is the reason the Yellow Ribbon Run project aims at connecting prisoners, ex-convicts and big companies – potential employers and at bringing them together. This is an effective way, according to the Yellow Ribbon Run project

organizers, to find out that people with criminal past can be very good and loyal employees.

"It is necessary to advance public awareness that we need not only to punish offenders, but we should also help them in changing their way of life so that they don't relapse into criminal behavior. We have been using traditional forms of educating people, in our organization, based on workshops, writing articles and producing leaflets... But it is clearly more interesting for our employees to wear a shirt with a yellow ribbon and promote this idea while running and interacting with other people," says Andrea Matoušková, director of the Czech Probation and Mediation Services. *"When people with a criminal record find a job, they get a chance to start a new life without the need to commit crimes again. And it gives the society a chance for a safer life in their neighborhoods,"* says she.

As Matoušková adds, ten companies involved in the Yellow Ribbon Run project currently employ prisoners. In recent years, these companies have created about 300 jobs for inmates and nearly 100 jobs for ex-offenders.

The Yellow Ribbon Run project is held under the auspices of the Czech Minister of Justice, Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs and the Public Defender of Rights. Races with a yellow ribbon – half marathon, marathon and relays – are being held as part of RunCzech races, and will be attended altogether by 369 runners. The relays are the biggest race in the series – expected 264 runners including 15 prisoners, 16 ex-offenders, or three crime victims, will hit the track on June, 14.

The 2017 edition of the prison run is co-organized with the help from the Prison Service of the Czech Republic, the Business Leaders Forum platform, nonprofit organization RUBIKON Centre, RunCzech and the Czech Probation and Mediation Service.

The project was made possible thanks to our partners. The company D.A.S. Ltd. is our general partner. Kostelec Sausages, Inc. is our golden partner. We also thank to our silver partners: LMC Ltd., Czech Forests Czech Republic and United Bakeries Inc., Bronze partners - Arriva Transport Czech Republic Inc., Hamerník Ltd., Schindler CZ, DP Work Ltd., Lion Products Ltd. and the marketing agency Wunderman. We have also partners supporting individual runners like Haryservis, Jevišovice Agro Inc., Froněk Ltd., Jipocar, IP System Inc and Still ČR. The project is also supported by individual runners from A-Giga Ltd., Microsoft, Axocom Ltd. and by a non-profit organization Helping Hands. Material support provided Dermacol Ltd. Papei Ltd., hotel Hilton Prague and hotel Hilton Prague Old Town. Our main media partner is the Czech Television and Pro Fair Play is our other partner for media.

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