



*“There are only few similar events like Candle Manifestation in the history of Slovakia. Especially due to its impressive message that common people can define the great histories of the nations. People who came here, lit their candles and demonstrated heroic character. Around the globe it was noticed and spoken about.”*

*František Mikloško, former dissident who co-organized Candle Manifestation*

*“It was Candle Manifestation with its non-violent Gandhi-like spirit that influenced upcoming historical events and peaceful revolution in Novembre 1989 in Czechoslovakia.”*

*Július Brocka, Secret Church activist who participated in Candle Manifestation*



with flashing lights and sirens came to the scene, running into the crowds, together with street flushers. People stayed and therefore the committee decided to use water cannons. **Policemen beat people with truncheons and singled out participants were arrested.** The police crackdown also went on in the adjacent streets and among the victims were people randomly passing by. In spite of the crackdown, groups of participants succeeded in demonstrating until the official end at 18:30.

#### THE MANIFESTATION IN NUMBERS

- There were approx. 3,500 citizens who gathered directly at the square; together with people in adjacent streets there were from 8,000 to 10,000 participants;
- 1,061 members of the security forces were deployed;
- 141 citizens were arrested by the security forces;
- 14 people were injured during the police crackdown.

#### THE CANDLE MANIFESTATION'S CONSEQUENCES

The whole world learned that the manifestation was brutally dispersed, which invoked both official and non-official pro-

tests. It was the biggest protest against the Communist regime in Czechoslovakia after 1969 and showed that, in spite of repression threats, people were courageous enough to demonstrate in public. The manifestation, showing non-violent resistance, adumbrated and inspired ‘the gentle’ character of the fall of the Communist regime in 1989. At the same time, it was a unique contribution that Slovakia made to the revolt against the Communist regime.

#### WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

Recommended websites:

[www.upn.gov.sk](http://www.upn.gov.sk); [www.svieckovamanifestacia.sk](http://www.svieckovamanifestacia.sk); [www.enrs.eu](http://www.enrs.eu)



## CANDLE MANIFESTATION

MARCH 25, 1988 IN BRATISLAVA

*The Candle Manifestation (or Bratislava Good Friday) was a peaceful display of citizens demonstrating for religious freedom and civic rights in socialist Czechoslovakia that took place at Hviezdoslav Square in Bratislava on March 25, 1988. Security forces brutally attacked peacefully manifesting citizens and they were dispersed. It was one of the most significant protests of citizens and churchgoers against the Communist regime in former Czechoslovakia.*





Church was the strongest opposition group against Communism in Slovakia

March 25, 1988



Photos from the Candle Manifestation

1980s



A pilgrimage in Šaštín



## REASONS LEADING TO THE MANIFESTATION

Right after the Communists took power in 1948, they considered churches and churchgoers to be their enemies, in accordance with Karl Marx, who developed the theory of Communism and his thesis that religion is 'the opium of the people'. **One of the main objectives of Communists was to weaken the influence of and to liquidate churches as well as the religious feelings of the inhabitants.** It was accompanied by imprisonment of church leaders and priests, forcible liquidation of the monastic life, political trials. **Therefore the Secret Church was founded, consisting of small groups of activists and secretly ordained priests. Its structures spread quickly throughout Slovakia.** At the end of the 1980s, the Secret Church activities intensified, leading to mass processions, campaigns that gained thousands of signatories and finally the Candle Manifestation.

## PREPARATIONS FOR THE MANIFESTATION

The idea to organise the Candle Manifestation was born within Slovakia's political exile. Its father was Marián Šťastný, the Executive Vicepresident of the Slovak World Congress. He

decided to protest against the Communist regime by organising protests in democratic countries. Šťastný informed the Christian opposition representatives in Slovakia and invited them to join that event. He sent a message about the planned manifestation to Ján Čarnogurský. **Secret Church activists welcomed the idea and organised a manifestation for religious freedom and respecting civil rights in Bratislava.** František Mikloško, Ján Čarnogurský, Silvester Krčméry, Vladimír Jukl and Rudolf Fiby were the main organisers. They were actively involved in the Secret Church's structure. **František Mikloško on March 10, 1988 officially notified the authorities that a peaceful manifestation of citizens, calling for Catholic bishops to be appointed to vacant offices in Slovakia, according to the decision adopted by the Holy Father, and for full religious freedom and respecting civil rights, would take place on March 25, 1988.** Information about the planned manifestation was disseminated through the Secret Church's structure and the international radio stations Voice of America and Radio Free Europe.

## REACTIONS TO THE REGIME

The communist regime's representatives classified the manifestation as a treasonous provocation and all possible measures were

taken to threaten the citizens and discourage them from participating. A special committee was established. Prior to the manifestation the traffic was stopped in Bratislava. All university students got a free day, their participation in the manifestation was banned. The cinemas showed the most attractive films. **The security forces made special preparations; a plan of extraordinary measures was adopted, members of the Police Corps and Secret Police were mobilised and the available technical equipment was made ready with the aim to disperse the manifestation by force.** On the day of the protest the leading Catholic representatives of dissent were arrested.

## THE COURSE OF THE MANIFESTATION

In spite of the adopted measures, the manifestation began in the early evening at Hviezdoslav Square on March 25, 1988 with participants singing the national and Papal anthems. The participants manifested for religious freedom and civic rights by praying with the rosary with candles in their hands. After the introductory appeals were made for them to leave the square, the political committee ordered the police to disperse the manifestation by force. First, the yellow-white police vehicles