

## Holocaust Memorial Day: 27 January 2019

### Summary

Holocaust Memorial Day takes place annually on 27 January. The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, a charity established and funded by the Government to “promote and support Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK”, states that the day provides an opportunity to “remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, and the millions of people killed under Nazi Persecution and in subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur”.<sup>1</sup> The date marks the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in Poland, which took place on 27 January 1945.

### Background

Holocaust Memorial Day was created on 27 January 2000, when representatives from 46 governments, including the UK, met in Stockholm, Sweden, to discuss Holocaust remembrance, education and research. Following the meeting, all attendees signed a declaration committing to “preserve the memory of those who have been murdered in the Holocaust”.<sup>2</sup> The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust has explained that the declaration became the “statement of commitment which is still used as a basis for Holocaust Memorial Day activities today”.<sup>3</sup>

This year’s Holocaust Memorial Day is taking place under the theme ‘torn from home’, which the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust hopes will “encourage audiences to reflect on how the enforced loss of a safe place to call ‘home’ is part of the trauma faced by anyone experiencing persecution and genocide”.<sup>4</sup> According to the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, also known as ‘Yad Vashem’, by the end of World War II between seven and nine million people had been “uprooted from their homes by the Nazis”.<sup>5</sup> Of those who had survived the Holocaust, approximately 250,000 Jews were staying in displaced persons’ camps in the Allied zones of Europe by the end of 1946.<sup>6</sup> These camps were overseen by Allied authorities and the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, with many of these camps previously used as concentration camps and German army camps. Describing the conditions of the displaced persons’ camps, the World Holocaust Remembrance Centre notes that “food and clothing were in short supply, space was at a premium and privacy was almost non-existent”; despite this, Jewish refugees “managed even with these limitations”.<sup>7</sup>

In addition to Holocaust Memorial Day, 27 January also marks the International Day of Commemoration in Memory of the Victims of the Holocaust; a date adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 1 November 2005 through resolution 60/7.<sup>8</sup> The resolution also called on United Nations member states to develop educational programmes “to instil the memory of the tragedy in future generations to prevent genocide from occurring again”.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the resolution requested that the United Nations Secretary-General establish an outreach programme, titled ‘Holocaust and the United Nations’, and “institute measures to mobilize civil society for Holocaust remembrance and education” to “help prevent future acts of genocide”.<sup>10</sup> The Holocaust and the United Nations outreach programme was established in January 2006.<sup>11</sup>

## **Government Policy on Holocaust Remembrance**

### ***Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in London***

In January 2015, the then Prime Minister, David Cameron, launched a competition to design a Holocaust memorial and underground learning centre in London. David Cameron announced in January 2016 that Victoria Tower Gardens, next to the Palace of Westminster, would be the site of the memorial.<sup>12</sup> The final design will comprise of 23 bronze fins to the southern end of the gardens, with the gaps between the fins representing the “22 countries where the Holocaust destroyed Jewish communities”.<sup>13</sup> It is hoped the memorial will give visitors an “improved understanding of the Holocaust and its impact on Britain”.<sup>14</sup> In a mission statement issued in December 2018, the Holocaust Memorial Foundation stated that the memorial would be “the United Kingdom’s national establishment for remembrance of the Holocaust” and would be dedicated to the “six million Jewish men, women and children murdered in the Holocaust and all other victims of the Nazis and their collaborators”.<sup>15</sup> The learning centre will also “celebrate the ways” that Britain “intervened for the safety of the Jewish communities in Europe”, but will also examine “what more could have been done to protect individuals and families”.<sup>16</sup> The Government has previously committed £50 million to the project, with the aim of kick-starting a “society-wide fundraising effort which will meet the costs of construction and operation”.<sup>17</sup> Adding to the mission statement, the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, James Brokenshire, stated:

By placing the greatest example of where democratic institutions elsewhere failed to protect its citizens next to our own Parliament, we [the Government] are making a strong commitment to stand up whenever our shared values are threatened.<sup>18</sup>

However, there has been some opposition to the memorial being built in Victoria Tower Gardens.<sup>19</sup> For example, the Thorney Island Society (TIS), who are the civic society for the area around Westminster and Parliament Square, are currently campaigning to stop the building of the memorial and underground learning centre. In a press release, published in May 2018, the TIS argued that London “cannot afford to lose this tranquil small park, not even for this worthy cause”.<sup>20</sup> The TIS also stated that Victoria Tower Gardens is the “only significant riverside green space in central London that is not separated from the river by a main road”, and provided “an uninterrupted view of the House of Lords”.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Holocaust Education in Schools***

In January 2016, the House of Commons Education Committee published the results of its inquiry into the provision of Holocaust education in schools in the United Kingdom. Its remit included:

- The quality of the teaching of the Holocaust and educational programmes in schools.
- The impact of teaching the Holocaust on young people.
- The focus on the Holocaust in the national curriculum and the absence of teaching of other genocides.
- Training for teachers in Holocaust education.
- The implementation of the recommendations by the Prime Minister’s Holocaust Commission which have relevance to teaching in schools.<sup>22</sup>

The committee noted that a “growing number” of students attended schools, such as academies, where the Holocaust was not required to be taught by the national curriculum.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, the committee called on the Government to “take steps” to ensure that Holocaust education did not become

“inadvertently patchy”.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the committee found that the status of the Holocaust within the national curriculum had created demand for “high quality teacher training” on the subject.<sup>25</sup> It called for the Department for Education to support the “organisations it funds to deliver Holocaust education to more history teachers”.<sup>26</sup>

The Government published its response in April 2016. It stated that University College London’s Institute of Education’s Centre for Holocaust Education (CfHE), which helps “ensure teachers have access to the training and resources they need to deliver effective Holocaust education”, had “already exceeded its targets” in providing an initial teacher education programme on the Holocaust.<sup>27</sup> The programme is usually delivered as a one-day course in both universities and initial teacher education institutions across England. The Government noted that, as of February 2016, approximately 1,175 teachers had engaged with the CfHE programme in continuing professional development and initial teacher education. Out of those who had engaged with the programme, 79 percent were history teachers. The Government also said that, since 2006, it had funded the Holocaust Educational Trust’s ‘Lessons from Auschwitz’ project.<sup>28</sup> This involves students meeting and listening to a Holocaust survivor speak about their experiences and visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau in Poland. The Holocaust Educational Trust has reported that, since 1999, over 37,000 students and teachers had participated in the project.<sup>29</sup>

## **Events to Commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day**

Every year, thousands of events take place to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day across the United Kingdom. This includes events in Parliament, local authorities, workplaces, schools, universities, museums and other settings, which allow people to “come together to learn lessons from the past, to create a safer, better future”.<sup>30</sup>

### **Events in Parliament**

A number of events have been scheduled to take place across Parliament to commemorate this year’s Holocaust Memorial Day; for example, the House of Commons held a debate on 24 January 2019,<sup>31</sup> and the House of Lords will hold a remembrance event on 31 January 2019.<sup>32</sup> The remembrance event will be chaired by the Lord Speaker, with parliamentarians, staff, civil servants and guests invited to hear the personal stories of survivors of both the Holocaust and the Bosnian genocide.

### **Public Events**

In addition to the events taking place in Parliament, there will also be several events taking place across the UK. For example, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust will be organising the annual [UK Commemorative Event for Holocaust Memorial Day](#). It describes the event as a “focal point” of Holocaust Memorial Day, which “brings together the civic, faith and political leadership of the country, alongside survivors of the Holocaust and more recent genocides”.<sup>33</sup> Other events included a [commemorative event at the Jewish Museum in London](#),<sup>34</sup> where attendees would hear testimonies from survivors of both the Holocaust and the Rwandan genocide, and a [webcast with the holocaust survivor, Harry Spiro](#), hosted by the Holocaust Educational Trust.<sup>35</sup>

### **Further Information**

- House of Commons Library, [General Debate on Holocaust Memorial Day 2019](#), 22 January 2019
- UK Government website, [‘UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation’](#), accessed 21 January 2019

- Holocaust Educational Trust, [Holocaust Memorial Day 2019: Guidance Notes](#), December 2018; and [Holocaust Memorial Day 2019: Theme Vision](#), June 2018

<sup>1</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, [‘What is Holocaust Memorial Day’](#), accessed 15 January 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, [‘The Stockholm Declaration’](#), accessed 16 January 2019.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, [Holocaust Memorial Day 2019: Theme Vision](#), June 2018, p 1.

<sup>5</sup> World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, [Displaced Persons, Jewish](#), accessed 18 January 2019, p 1.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> World Holocaust Remembrance Centre, [‘Displaced Persons Camps’](#), accessed 21 January 2019.

<sup>8</sup> Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, [‘Resolution Adopted by the General Assembly on the Holocaust Remembrance \(A/RES/60/7, 1 November 2005\)’](#), accessed 21 January 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme, [‘About the Holocaust and the United Nations Outreach Programme’](#), accessed 16 January 2019.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [‘PM: Holocaust Memorial Will Stand Beside Parliament as Permanent Statement of our British Values’](#), 27 January 2016.

<sup>13</sup> UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, [‘Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects Win UK Holocaust Memorial International Design Competition’](#), 24 October 2017.

<sup>14</sup> UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, [‘UK Holocaust Memorial to Reaffirm Britain’s Commitment to Stand Up Against Antisemitism, Prejudice and Hatred’](#), 4 December 2018.

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, [‘Public Consultation Marks Next Stage in Development of UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre’](#), 4 September 2018.

<sup>18</sup> UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation, [‘UK Holocaust Memorial to Reaffirm Britain’s Commitment to Stand Up Against Antisemitism, Prejudice and Hatred’](#), 4 December 2018.

<sup>19</sup> David Tollerton, [‘The Problem with London’s New Holocaust Memorial’](#), The Conversation, 26 October 2017.

<sup>20</sup> London Society, [‘Victoria Tower Gardens and the Holocaust Memorial’](#), 4 May 2018.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Holocaust Education](#), 24 January 2016, HC 480 of session 2015–16, p 5.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p 14.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*, p 10.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> House of Commons Education Committee, [Holocaust Education: Government Response to the Committee’s Second Report of Session 2015–16](#), 21 April 2016, HC 974 of session 2015–16, p 2.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p 4.

<sup>29</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, [‘Lessons from Auschwitz Project’](#), accessed 17 January 2019.

<sup>30</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, [‘Local HMD Activities’](#), accessed 18 January 2019.

<sup>31</sup> [HC Hansard, 24 January 2018, cols 379–420.](#)

<sup>32</sup> Eventbrite, [‘Holocaust Memorial Day Event \(Parliament\)’](#), accessed 24 January 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, [‘UK Commemorative Event’](#), accessed 18 January 2019.

<sup>34</sup> Jewish Museum London, [‘Holocaust Memorial Day Event’](#), accessed 24 January 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, [‘Join Our Live Survivor Testimony Webcast for Holocaust Memorial Day’](#), 24 January 2019.

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