



Holocaust Memorial Day 2007:

The Dignity of Difference

"May the memory of the victims of the Holocaust become our immune system against hate. May we stand together, fighting prejudice together."

Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi

Introduction

The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2007 encourages us to look at what we learn from the Holocaust about the consequences of exclusion based on people's difference from us. It highlights the experiences of a variety of groups under the Nazis. It also explores the opportunities this history gives us to consider how we can create a society based on respect for difference. The theme involves several aspects:

History: The theme explores how exclusionary policy towards the Jews, Gypsies (Roma and Sinti), disabled people, lesbian and gay people, and black people and other groups developed under the Nazis. It attempts to understand the consequences of the Nazi theories of racial purity within what has become known as the Racial State. It will identify how populist ideology led to different patterns of persecution, in which different institutions or professional classes within military and civil society participated – including health, police and the judiciary. In particular, it questions how ordinary bystanders reacted to the increasingly divisive legislation.

Reflection: The theme questions what might have been done in the past to overcome the exclusion experienced by victimised groups – and to recognise the particularity of their experience. It reflects on the consequences for a number of individuals and groups caught up as victims of exclusion, and on what might have been done differently to avoid or alleviate the suffering they experienced. It also looks at the way people can face discrimination or exclusion because they are identified as belonging to a targeted group.

Action: This theme encourages us to think about the lives of people marginalized and excluded in the Holocaust, in subsequent genocides and today, and what might be done to celebrate difference and create a culture of respect. It identifies that victims are never in the best position to defend their own victimisation and that the champions of change are those who are prepared to widen their 'universe of moral obligation' and consider the lives of others as a part of their own life. The theme explores how individuals and communities might contribute to this in a meaningful and practical way.

History

The Indignity of Exclusion

The Nazis knew how to exclude. In their warped world view, they needed to maintain Aryan genetic purity or 'hygiene', as they described it. Jews and Gypsies were excluded because of their parentage and culture. Jews were scapegoated as bearing particular responsibility for many of Germany's woes. Disabled people and people with mental health needs were excluded because the Nazis viewed their disability or health need as indicative of 'weak' genes. Lesbian and gay people were excluded for two

reasons: because their sexuality was in itself deemed an indication of genetic weakness; and because, particularly in the case of women, if their behaviour did not conform to strict Nazi gender role models, they were deemed genetically 'asocial'. Black people and Slavs were excluded purely on the basis of their race.

Individuals and groups were pushed to the margins because of their identity. This led to loss of livelihood, loss of friendship, loss of security. It led to the indignity of persecution, incarceration, torture, starvation, slavery and death. Identified as the enemy, the Jews were stripped of the rights of citizenship, their human rights abused.

The Nazis created an ideology based on supremacy, in which one group had rights which purposefully targeted specific groups. They described them as 'lower people' - '*Untermenschen*'. The development of a hierarchy created a sense of better and worse, safe and dangerous, good and bad, righteous and evil. Ultimately, the Jews of Europe were driven from their homes, shot in forests, crammed into cattle wagons, gassed and burned. The Gypsies were also subject to mass murder; many were shot by special killing squads and thousands killed in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. The disabled were targeted in a euthanasia programme. Many lesbian and gay people died as prisoners in the camp system. Many Slavic people were taken for use as slave labourers and died from executions and mistreatment.

That is the ultimate destructive power of exclusion.

The Ideology of Exclusion

The Nazis created a racial state. All groups that did not fit into the pattern of Aryan perfection were deemed unfit in some way to participate fully in the Third Reich. Differences were identified as weaknesses. Cultural and religious differences, ethnic identity, political persuasion and sexual orientation all became factors in demeaning individuals and justifying their removal from participation in the society.

Most important was the process by which the Nazi Party persuaded their staff and the general population to shift their behaviour to accept and apply Nazi policies so consistently. The Nazi regime is rightly identified as a brutal regime that used suppression and fear as a tool to ensure compliance. But large proportions of the population were persuaded, if not to perpetrate genocide, to justify being bystanders.

Wanda von Baeyer-Katte identified four steps used by people in the Third Reich to justify their actions as bystanders or participants. This was based on her observations as a German psychologist at the time:

1. *Double Language: In which people were aware of the contradiction posed by the new situation of what was accepted as normal behaviour. 'I cannot and will not stand for this much longer.'*
2. *Partial Adaptation: Typified by denial and rationalisation. 'I am not a hypocrite, so I must believe some of what I am saying. National Socialism must be right in some aspects.'*
3. *Moral Dissolution: 'I would never be part of a criminal organisation. I am no criminal... What is happening is tragic, but inevitable. Because I am witnessing the removal of my boss does not mean I am condoning a criminal act.'*
4. *Adjustment: 'Victims are no longer human beings. Nazi norms are accepted and adopted. My boss is not my responsibility. He had it coming. He does not matter anyway.'*

Adapted from: Wanda von Baeyer-Katte, *Das Zerstörende in der Politik*, Heidelberg, 1958.

The shift toward compliance meant that the Nazis could carry out their policies with impunity. As law makers, they deemed themselves beyond the law; and ordinary people were allowing themselves to be convinced that what was happening was in their interest. The policies of exclusion created barriers that

became increasingly difficult to cross. Most Germans did not know or mix with Jews and therefore had no real perception of what Jews were like. There was no real reason to act affirmatively based on personal experience. A combination of apathy, fear, ignorance and lack of personal relationship with the victims created a divide at a personal level which was unbridgeable. It was safer not to react, so most did not. The relatively small proportion of Jews – less than half of one per cent of the population – increased their vulnerability.

The Nazis identified a variety of criteria by which to exclude various groups from German society. These were applied with uneven ferocity, depending on the geographic location, racial group and period across the twelve years that the Nazis were in power. What was consistent was the identification of the group as excluded members of German society.

Racial difference was the cornerstone of Nazi supremacist ideology. Though Jews were the main scapegoat and focus, they were not the only target of racism.

Notwithstanding their ‘Aryan’ heritage, **Roma** were classed as ‘*Untermenschen*’ and as being ‘asocial’ – unproductive and socially unfit. Their fate in some ways paralleled that of the Jews. The 1935 Nuremberg Laws defining Jews were adapted to include Roma. They were subjected to internment, forced labour and massacre. They were also subject to deportation to extermination camps. *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing squads) killed tens of thousands of Roma in the German-occupied eastern territories. The Lodz ghetto had a special section for Roma, from where they were deported to Chelmno in Poland and killed in the mobile gas vans. There was also a ‘Gypsy camp’ in Auschwitz-Birkenau, where almost all of them died in the gas chambers or became victims of medical experiments. After the war, discrimination against the Roma continued as the Federal Republic of Germany decided that all measures taken against them before 1943 were legitimate policies of state.

The relatively few **Black people** living in continental Europe at the time belies the hatred toward black ethnicity and culture felt by the Nazis. Their fate in Nazi Germany and in German-occupied territories from 1933 to 1945 ranged from isolation to persecution, sterilisation, medical experimentation, incarceration, brutality and murder. However, there was no systematic programme to eliminate them as there was for Jews and other groups. Music linked to black culture, which included jazz and swing, was branded degenerate and banned. European and American blacks were also interned in the Nazi concentration camp system. Black prisoners of war faced illegal incarceration and mistreatment because the Nazis did not uphold the regulations imposed by the Geneva Convention. Black soldiers of the American, French and British armies were worked to death on construction projects or died as a result of mistreatment in the camps. Some were killed immediately by the SS or Gestapo.

Slavs were also classed as inferior (*Untermenschen*) and targeted for subjugation, slave labour and eventual annihilation. This included the Poles, Russians and a variety of Balkan and East European communities. There was particular vehemence reserved for Slavs who were loyal to Communism. The ‘Commissar Order’ targeted high-level Soviet state and Communist Party officials to be murdered. In the *AB-Aktion* Poles regarded as ideologically dangerous (including intellectuals and Catholic priests) were targeted for execution. The first inmates of the Auschwitz complex were Poles; Majdanek was being extended at the end of the war to incarcerate Slavic slave labour. Soviet prisoners of war received especially brutal treatment; they were incarcerated in intolerable conditions and used as experimental victims for gas chambers. Over 500,000 Russian prisoners of war were murdered.

Disabled people were treated as a burden. Those with disabilities were excluded from all opportunity to live within society. Victims of mental illness were segregated. Some were sterilised; others were murdered. Victims of disabilities, including congenital diseases, were similarly removed as a threat to the purity of the race, which was not only seen as being pure by Aryan descent, but ideally free of congenital disease. Over 70,000 patients of mental hospitals and disabled people were murdered as a part of the T4 euthanasia programme. In Nazi terminology, ‘euthanasia’ was a euphemism for the systematic killing of

institutionalized mentally and physically disabled patients. Starting in October 1939, disabled children were murdered by overdoses of medication or by starvation. This programme was then extended to adult disabled patients living in institutions and Hitler signed a secret authorization to protect participating doctors and staff from prosecution. The secret operation was code-named T4, referring to the address (Tiergartenstrasse 4) of its coordinating office in Berlin. An unknown number of victims were also sterilised. Doctors, nurses and other professions normally associated in care-giving participated in this process. The euthanasia programme instituted the use of gas chambers and crematoria for systematic murder.

Sexual Orientation and gender identity, where it diverged from the strict Nazi stereotypes of heterosexuality and gender roles, were classed as degenerate, asocial and a threat to racial purity that required them to be expunged from society. This meant that gay men in particular were targeted for persecution and removal. In some German jurisdictions, such as Austria, lesbians were explicitly included in the anti-gay laws and in others they were not, but there is much evidence of the way in which they were deemed 'asocial' even in those areas. The mere suspicion of being gay was punishable by incarceration and torture. During the so-called Cloister Trials, Hitler used this to reduce the power of the Church. Before the election of Hitler, Berlin in particular had led the world with a flowering of visible lesbian and gay culture and study, that would not be repeated in its intensity until the 1960s and 1970s. The Nazis targeted the more than one million men who were said to have undermined their 'disciplined masculinity'. Some 80,000-100,000 men were convicted as homosexuals. Most were placed in brutal police prisons where they were tortured, starved or subjected to slave labour. Many were placed in concentration camps, often being housed together and subjected to specific experiments or tortures. Some were forced to wear Pink Triangles, some black or green, some letter "A"s. The Allies did not liberate gay victims. Many were forced to complete their term of imprisonment. They were not recognised officially as 'victims of the Nazis'. It was the police staff, lawyers and judges who were responsible for carrying out the homophobic persecution; none were removed or disciplined for this. Many Survivors felt so excluded after they war that they chose to try to hide their experiences, or if they fought for recognition, were thwarted and excluded further. In fact, the Nazi anti-gay laws were not removed until the 1960s, and as a result generations of German lesbian and gay people lived in the shadow of the Nazi period well after World War 2 was over. It was not until 1986 that the German President formally recognised gay suffering.

Other groups were excluded, not for racial reasons, but because they had beliefs which the Nazi regime believed threatened them.

Political expression deemed a threat to National Socialism was silenced. As a dictatorship, political dissent was quickly quashed, including that within the Party. Political movements, including labour movements such as trade unions, were outlawed and its defenders persecuted. Political dissent was removed from the press through change of control. Other forms of dissemination through illegal journalism, or preaching alternative ideals were quickly suppressed. Political opponents were among the earliest victims of Nazi discrimination – primarily Communists, Socialists, Social Democrats and trade unionists. The first concentration camp, Dachau, was established in 1933 in order to detain political prisoners.

Religious beliefs were persecuted where they were considered to counter Nazi ideals and Christian Church leaders who opposed Nazism were imprisoned. Priests and lay preachers who spoke against the supremacy of Nazi ideology were removed. Many died in camps and labour units. Many Jehovah's Witnesses were subjected to intense persecution under the Nazi regime because they refused to accept the authority of the state and often made a conscious choice not to join the German armed forces. Their determination to oppose National Socialism was seen as a threat to the powerful military being developed. Soon after the Nazis came to power, regional governments took aggressive steps against the Witnesses, breaking up their meetings and occupying their local offices. By 1 April 1935, local officials were ordered to dissolve the Watchtower Society. When compulsory military service was reintroduced in Germany in March 1935, the conflict with the Witnesses intensified. For refusing to join the armed forces and continuing to meet illegally, increasing numbers of Jehovah's Witnesses were arrested and incarcerated in

prisons and concentration camps. The number of Jehovah's Witnesses who died in concentration camps and prisons is estimated at 1,000 Germans and 400 from other countries. About 250 German Jehovah's Witnesses were executed for refusing to serve in the German military.

The list of groups excluded and persecuted by the regime is an extensive one. The Nazis were creating an exclusive society that privileged a select group at the expense of many others, who were not considered fit to play a full role in the society or were seen as a threat to it. It relied on those with privileges not to challenge the new status quo and to accept the ethics of exclusion.

“Excluding people from the community – defining them as outsiders – profoundly changes the daily relationships between people and groups. A gap between insiders and outsiders opens. As it is reinforced by law and popular opinion, it widens. Consciously or unconsciously, insiders reshape their own identities to justify the exclusion of the outsiders... Victims are not just ignored. Eventually they become repugnant, are perceived as threats to the community, as burdens on society and on the conscience of those who remain silent.”

Victoria Barnett, *Bystanders - Conscience and Complicity During the Holocaust*, Greenwood Press, 1999

The Holocaust – The Ultimate Exclusion

Jews in Germany had long since striven to integrate into German society. Architecture, language and Jewish culture all had a strikingly German feel to it. Progressive forms of Judaism had even adapted to emulate certain Christian forms of worship. German Jews signed up to fight in the German armed forces in the First World War. German Jews fired their bayonets at English Jews in the trenches with patriotic pride for the ‘Fatherland’.

German Jews were willing to play an active and integrated part in their society, but underlying antisemitism still marginalised them. A fundamental lack of respect for difference, fuelled by a millennium of religious antagonism from the Christian Church and simmering political unrest were fault lines waiting to be exploited by populist extremism.

It was a step-by-step process in which Jews were first identified as unreliable, politically dangerous, part of a wider conspiracy, controlling the destiny of ordinary citizens. They were the scapegoat for Germany's ills, turned into a threat to national and personal security as a group. Once they were perceived as a threat, the Nazis began to persuade the public that such a threat should be removed. The demonisation and dehumanisation of the Jews as a bacillus infecting society, vermin overrunning the rights of ordinary people played on fears and created a populist myth bolstering support for Nazi extremism.

“Why must we be enemies of the Jews? Because the Jews are a destructive force within the German nation. When there is a foreign body within us... we must make sure it disappears; otherwise we will be destroyed by it.”

Erich Melitius, *We and the Jews – What Young People Must Know about the Jews*, Berlin, 1935

Every aspect of exclusion was given a legal veneer. Once the Nazis were in power, the Jews were excluded by law. Lawyers were removed from the courts, civil servants from their posts in local and national government, bankers from their banks, editors from their newspapers and Jewish people from their rights as citizens. After Jews were excluded within their own society, it was easy to create a culture of persecution. The Nazi regime was tyrannical, but it had created the reason to suppress the Jews – they were enemies of the State. Under the conditions of war, enemies are to be fought. The Jews – through no fault of their own – had become enemies of a genocidal regime. The mass murder of European Jews was the logical consequence of the Nazis' ideology of exclusion.

Reflection

Dignity through Remembrance

Public remembrance is not for the benefit of victims to remember what happened to them. Victims remember well what happened to them. Public reflection is the act of recognition. It states to the victims and their families that their humanity is valued, that their loss is our loss and that their suffering is shared, if only through recognising the tragedy and error of its occurrence.

Conversely, ignoring suffering is an act of denial. Forgetfulness insults, excludes and marginalizes the victims through uncertainty and humiliation. Recognising and reflecting on all the victim groups persecuted by the Nazis is part of ensuring the dignity of remembrance. There can be no comparison of suffering. Every life lost through the ideology of hatred engendered by the Nazis was a life wasted and should be remembered as such.

Remembering the Jews who were all, without exception, marked out for murder gives identity to many who have been forgotten. The Nazis intended to wipe out the Jews without trace of any memory afforded to individuals and their lives. There are still almost two million Jews who do not have the dignity of a name. Our act of remembrance recognises that they were individuals just like us. It opposes the anonymity that genocide imposes and remembers that although they are lost to us, they are remembered nevertheless.

Remembering the Roma, who were murdered because of their ethnic identity, lends belated but hitherto forgotten dignity to their suffering. Forms of remembrance in the Roma tradition mean they are often less visible and therefore less public. Their untimely deaths cannot be reversed. Their humanity still needs recognition.

Remembering the victims of racial persecution, including black and mixed race victims, provides dignity to the many who were humiliated through sterilisation and pain throughout their lives. It recognises that such pain is real and has lasting consequences. Now these victims are fading from history with no heirs, thus completing the genocidal cycle begun sixty years ago.

Remembering mentally and physically disabled people who, then as now, were among the most vulnerable members of society. We reflect that it was their vulnerability which led to their isolation, removal and death. Their experience is all but lost, because they did not have a voice then and their deaths are shrouded by guilt. The next of kin either complied with the conspiracy of silence or were oblivious to the reasons behind the deaths of their relatives. It reminds us of the extent to which the vulnerable within our society rely on others for protection.

Remembering lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans-people who were branded as degenerate and incarcerated in the network of concentration camps, police prisons and slave labour camps – or were forced into lives of hiding, repression and fear. In recognising the indignity of enforcing the wearing of the 'A' or the triangle on clothing, dignity is given to their endurance in intolerable circumstances. This reminds us that sexuality was no reason to be enslaved and to value individuals irrespective of sexual orientation or gender identity.

Remembering the courageous few who spoke out in political or religious opposition to the oppressive politics and evil ethics of Nazis assists us to reflect on their bravery and their outspokenness against oppression. They used their voice, irrespective of the consequences. Reminding ourselves about their courage expresses gratitude that they stood by the basic freedoms of free speech and used it effectively, even if at the time it seemed in vain.

The Dignity of Difference

We live in society that benefits from tremendous variety. We are differentiated by ethnic background, language, religion, customs, dress, cuisine, country of birth, sexual orientation, skin colour, geography, social class, education, professional qualification... to name but a few factors. The things that differentiate us are nevertheless less significant than the many basic human features that we share. The desire to share common values, the right to freedom of expression, to have family and friends, to have security, habitat, the desire to be healthy, to have a basic education, to be able to have our own religious beliefs, to choose our leaders, to influence our society, to have control of our own destiny, the desire to be respected for what we are... and so on... These are basic rights and privileges that we all want to share.

The things that differentiate us are at times used as the reasons to divide us.

Identifying certain practices, beliefs or customs as being in some way inferior to our own is the first step to normalising supremacy. The German public were not *genocidaires* in-waiting. They were ordinary people who believed the lie that the Jews were in some way less worthy and were controlling a conspiracy to threaten their security. They did not really know the Jews as people and respect them for who they were. They treated them as others told them they deserved to be treated. The success of Nazi policy was founded on the ubiquitous belief that the Jews did not deserve the same rights and respect as everyone else.

Differentiation became the excuse for exclusion.

"It wasn't only the Jews. It was also the mentally ill, the physically handicapped, the Gypsies and the gays who were imprisoned, tortured, shot, gassed and turned to ash because they didn't fit someone's narrow template of what it means to be human... Jews cannot fight antisemitism alone, Muslims cannot fight islamaphobia alone, gays cannot fight homophobia alone. The victim cannot cure the crime, the hated cannot cure the hater. We are as big or as small as the space we make for others who are not like us. May the memory of the victims of the Holocaust become our immune system against hate. May we stand together, fighting prejudice together."

Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi

The Jews were in no position to defend themselves against National Socialism. They were a small minority struggling for survival. What they needed were people who could identify the threat they were under, listen to their distress, speak out and act on their behalf. The victims of exclusion are almost always vulnerable minorities whose voice is drowned out through the politics of exclusion and who therefore require individuals and organisations to hear them and then act to champion their cause.

The Jews needed ordinary Germans, neighbouring governments, religious institutions and individuals to use their voice early and effectively to stem the tide of hatred. The Jews were not considered important enough for such mobilisation.

Our Universe of Moral Obligation

Genocide scholar Helen Fein describes the 'Universe of Moral Obligation' as being those people and things which we see it as our responsibility to protect. It involves the whole debate about identity, belonging and Britishness. For most of us this will include our next of kin, our children, our house, car and job... that is those things which give our life its fundamental meaning and support. Few of us regard people from other communities or countries within that universe, except when we volunteer for a cause or make charitable donations to worthy causes. Fein's argument is that until the potential victims of genocide are seen as our responsibility, their deaths are never likely to be prevented, as no one is likely to speak or act to protect them.

German protestant pastor Martin Niemoeller famously referred to how people who were being taken away by the Nazis did not fall within his own universe of moral responsibility.

*“First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a communist;
Then they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a socialist;
Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out – because I was not a trade unionist;
Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out – because I was not a Jew;
Then they came for me – and there was no left to speak out for me.*

Pastor Martin Niemoeller

Holocaust Memorial Day gives us the opportunity to think about who is within our own universe of moral obligation. If the German people were to have been ready to respond to threats against the Jews, they would have needed strong cohesive communities, long before the Nazis came to power. It is in times of relative peace that relationship-building is possible. That is when respecting the dignity of difference really counts, because once vulnerable groups are isolated, it becomes increasingly difficult to cross the gulf that opens up.

Action

An Opportunity for Inclusion

This theme is designed to engage a number of communities not ordinarily represented at Holocaust Memorial Day and provides them with an opportunity to share their experiences. It gives opportunity to include marginalized communities and encourage a wider participation within the activities of the day and encourage new stakeholders to engage with its aims. It allows us to look at the ways in which society separates people today. What are our perceptions of ‘the other’? How are these fears portrayed and played upon? How does this make ‘the other’ feel?

Today’s Excluded Individuals

HMD should encourage us to address exclusion in our society today. Inclusion is not a buzz word. Inclusion is when people make a real effort to make sure that people who are marginalised are given every opportunity to be included in society. HMD is an opportunity to give voice to voices that are not ordinarily heard, to empower the disempowered and to share common human values. Use the opportunity of this day to work with asylum seekers and refugees, with Gypsies, with representative groups (such as the black Police Officers Association, Stonewall, Disability Rights Commission, Religious bodies, etc).

Think of Somebody Different

Think of somebody different, who may not ordinarily participate in an event around HMD. Consider what they might have to offer, how they could bring experiences to the day, what you could learn from them, how you might enrich each other and the community. Make an effort to cross a cultural barrier to get to that person or group. You may want to include somebody from another ethnic community; a group with whom you are personally not yet comfortable for a political or ideological reason; a faith community not ordinarily involved; a group that is traditionally stereotyped or socially excluded for some reason. Think about how you might overcome cultural, religious or social difficulties in involving them in your planning or the delivery of your day. Try to include and listen to the individual or group that you are involving. Help them to feel a part of what we have to share about the dignity of difference. Create activities within your school, your organisation or across your community that celebrate difference, combat exclusion and give dignity to those who are marginalised.

Use this as an opportunity to bring people together, to listen, to learn, to remember and to enjoy being together in challenging circumstances.

Remember Together

Find a form of remembrance that can embrace a variety of faiths, cultures and communities. As you remember the Holocaust and reflect on the mass murder of European Jews, think of ways to remember those who were not Jewish who also suffered under the Nazis. Think also of ways to reflect with those who suffer today from exclusion or the consequences of racism in its many forms. There are communities around us where racism is alive today. This may be targeted at religious communities at local mosques, temples or gurdwaras. There may be young disaffected people engaged in youth activities, for whom difficulties with perceptions of their ethnic identity may be fundamental to their world view. Finding who may contribute to developing a more meaningful and shared experience of remembrance is a way of building bridges between communities.

A Mosaic of Victims

There was a mosaic of victims persecuted by the Nazis. Use the resources of HMD to help tell their stories so that their experiences are represented. Think about how you might facilitate the voices of a range of victims of National Socialism within your learning and sharing. You may want to find people to participate who are part of those same groups today – trade union representatives, gay and lesbian community members, Jehovah’s Witnesses, members of the travelling community, etc. Find ways for their voices to be heard.

Including New Communities

Many communities have arrived in Britain since the end of the Second World War. Among these are many people who came to the UK in search of a safe haven after fleeing persecution. They may not feel the events of the Second World War have any relevance for them personally, but they have a great deal to offer. Their communities should also be involved in ensuring that the dignity of difference is shared broadly and HMD made more relevant for communities who are not so intimately bound by its history and consequences.

Our Role in Prevention Genocide

When genocide occurs, it invariably evolves from unstable societies where disrespect, exclusion and underlying hatred have been part of the society for long time. Exclusion begins generally at a containable level, in which both perpetrator and victim groups accommodate to the situation and justify its creeping influence over a long period of time. Only when the exclusion reaches extreme levels do violence and genocide become remotely possible. The mistake is to think that there is nothing that one can do about the likelihood of genocide. Stable societies that have cohesive communities who genuinely respect each other’s values have never committed genocide. Recognising the dignity of difference and building respect is one of the best defences against a repetition of the Nazi period. It requires actions of us all.

“Genocide is not the act of extreme killing... it is the act of extreme `exclusion’.”

James M Smith, Aegis

Hate Crime and Community Safety

Respecting difference and valuing diversity are key components towards improving community safety and preventing hate crime. HMD provides an opportunity to reinforce the partnership between all communities, the local authority and the police service to promote reporting and tackle racist, homophobic, anti-disabled and other hate activities today. This includes initiatives with young people within formal and informal settings to address racist, homophobic or anti-disabled language and bullying in particular.

Building Respect Now

Getting to know one another, respecting difference, learning about one another is rarely a priority.

Difference keeps us apart for many legitimate reasons, but precisely because of that, we have to make a conscious effort to know each other better – and no longer put it off for another time because it takes time and real effort.

Making changes to the way we live together may be inconvenient and time-consuming.

Exclusion does not respect time, it exploits it.

Please take the time at Holocaust Memorial Day to build respect across our communities.