



**HOLOCAUST  
MEMORIAL  
DAY 27/1  
2021**



# BE THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS

The theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2021 is Be the Light in the Darkness. It encourages everyone to reflect on the depths humanity can sink to, but also the ways in which individuals and communities resisted that darkness to 'be the light' before, during and after genocide.

The theme **Be the Light in the Darkness** asks us to consider different kinds of 'darkness', for example, identity-based persecution, misinformation, denial of justice; and different ways of 'being the light', for example, resistance, acts of solidarity, rescue and illuminating mistruths.

Increasing levels of denial, division and misinformation in today's world mean we must remain vigilant against hatred and identity-based hostility. However, we can all stand in solidarity. We can choose to **Be the Light in the Darkness** in a variety of ways and places – at home, in public, and online.



Students light candles of remembrance at the UK Commemorative Ceremony for Holocaust Memorial Day 2020.



■ We will continue to do our bit for as long as we can, secure in the knowledge that others will continue to light a candle long after us. ■

Gena Turgel MBE, *survivor of the Holocaust (1923-2018)*

# DARKNESS DRAWS IN

Before every genocide, perpetrators divide society into those considered worthy of human treatment, and those who are not.

## a) The darkness of distortion and hate

In the lead up to genocide, distortions are deployed using propaganda and stereotyping to identify and victimise a specific group(s). These are followed by discrimination – often enshrined into law.

In Rwanda, propaganda broadcast on radio stations and printed in newspapers sought to dehumanise the Tutsi minority. It called Tutsi people ‘cockroaches’ and ‘snakes’, encouraging Hutus to view them as less than human.

## b) Emotional darkness

The darkness leading to and during genocide creates not only fear for physical safety, but also deep emotional trauma. Fear, hopelessness, dread – all have a profound and long-lasting impact. In a society led by perpetrator regimes, those persecuted can lose trust in their government, local communities and even in friends and family members. Mental and physical health is often impacted by the cruelty and indifference targeted groups experience, and can damage the ability to build future relationships.

In Cambodia when the Khmer Rouge took power, children were separated from their parents, residents forced from their homes in the cities to the countryside, and religion abolished. This deliberately disrupted important connections for people and their homes, family and faith.



Ntarama Church Genocide Memorial where 5,000 people were massacred on 15 April 1994 during the Rwandan genocide © Andrew Sutton



“The first insult was “Zigeuner, Schweine Zigeuner” – Gypsy pigs. I remember these words and I’ll die with them.”

Józef Sadowski, Roma survivor of Nazi Persecution



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# LIGHT DURING THE DARKNESS

There are many ways to be the light in the darkness, and some people choose to act – often at great risk to themselves.

## a) Resistance

Amid the darkness of genocide, there have always been those who oppose the regime, risking their own lives, homes and communities.

In Cambodia, at just 15 years old, Ronnie Yimsut, with over 200 other escapees of mass killings in the Tonle Sap area, attacked a Khmer Rouge garrison. They were armed with just sticks, stones and a few knives, against the modern weaponry of the regime's soldiers. Despite heavy casualties in the initial attack, they fought for three days before fleeing to the Thai border.

## b) Rescuers

Despite the personal danger they faced, there are examples during every genocide of individuals and groups defying regimes to save those they could. Choices like these are a beacon of hope, and an inspiration for others to resist cruelty and evil.

Appolinaire Kageruka, a teacher, survived the Genocide in Rwanda because Pascal, the father of one of his students and a Hutu, agreed to hide him for several weeks. Pascal also helped Appolinaire escape when the Interahamwe came to search Pascal's house, just two days before the end of the genocide.



The military camp in Kigali where 10 Belgian peacekeepers were tortured and murdered at the beginning of the Rwandan genocide © Andrew Sutton



**I chose Pascal because first of all, Pascal was a Hutu. But he would have been killed if they knew I was hiding in his house. So many people were killed when they were Hutu, because they were trying to hide Tutsis.**

*Appolinaire Kageruka, survivor of the Genocide in Rwanda*

# LIGHT DURING THE DARKNESS

## c) Lighting the way with kindness

Sometimes it is the smallest of choices and actions that provide light in dark places. Survivors emphasise that any kindness, when surrounded by suffering, indifference, and persecution, is powerful.

During the Genocide in Bosnia, Safet Vukalić took comfort from the people in his community who wanted to help – from the neighbour who refused to join the Bosnian Serb army, to the soldiers already in the army who brought him medication and food instead of torturing and killing like others did. In turn, his family also showed kindness and generosity to others, as his sister made long journeys every day to bring food to men imprisoned in concentration camps.

## d) Shining light into the darkness

Mukesh Kapila was the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Sudan between 2003 and 2004 where he spoke out to reveal the truth of the Genocide in Darfur. Whilst this in itself didn't stop genocide taking place, Mukesh's actions did lead to the formal indictment of Omar al-Bashir, the President of Sudan at that time. Al-Bashir was charged with Crimes Against Humanity and War Crimes by the International Criminal Court (ICC), and further charges of genocide were added in 2010. One person can make a difference by speaking out, instead of standing by.



Um Ziefa burning village, Darfur © Brian Steidle



**We knew from day one what was going on. But those stories were not being told. It wasn't lack of the stories, it was the failure to tell those stories, that ultimately led to the greatest tragedy of all.**

Mukesh Kapila, former UN coordinator in Darfur

# DARKNESS TODAY

## a) The darkness of denial and distortions of genocide

Denial is one of the common features of every genocide. Often those responsible for genocide will restrict access to physical locations and evidence, and seek to obscure their intentions and genocidal activity.

Today, denial of the Genocide in Bosnia is prevalent across Bosnian society. The current Mayor of Srebrenica, Mladen Grujicic, denies that the murder of Bosniak men and boys was genocide, and perpetrators have been lauded. In 2016, university halls in Pale, near Sarajevo, were officially named after Radovan Karadžić, just days before he was found guilty on charges of genocide and war crimes. In 2019, Bosnia's current Serbian president, Milorad Dodik, called the genocide a 'fabricated myth'.

## b) Identity based prejudice and hostility today

Identity-based hostility also continues to mar societies around the world. The continuing injustices and atrocities faced by groups such as the Rohingya in Myanmar, and Uighur Muslims in China, require world leaders to take action.

Prejudice and hostility against people based on their identity continues to hurt people and communities here in the UK. The number of hate crimes recorded by police in England and Wales rose by ten percent in the year October 2018 to October 2019, and for the seventh successive year since 2012. The highest rises were in crimes against disabled people, LGBT people, and those of different races.



A graveyard in Srebrenica where 8,000 people were killed during the Bosnian genocide  
(c) Paul M Kelly



**The more you examine and show the absurdity of Holocaust denial, the more someone telling the truth, particularly a survivor, shines stronger.**

David Baddiel, comedian and presenter of *Confronting Holocaust Denial with David Baddiel*

# BEING THE LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS TODAY

## a) Shining light through testimony

Survivors' testimonies have shed light on the Holocaust, Nazi Persecution and more recent genocides, even though they have been painful for many survivors to share. The effects of advancing age and ill health on Holocaust survivors make their witness testimony increasingly difficult to convey in person, yet many continue to educate others.

## b) Confronting denial, distortion and misinformation

As distortions and denial increase, facing the extent and nature of the crimes committed to reveal the truth of genocide and genocidal regimes is vital.

Denial, distortion and misinformation must be confronted by us all, and from all angles. Organisations working to confront extremism and Holocaust and genocide denial are lights in the dark places of the internet where conspiracy theories, hatred and prejudice are promoted and spread.

## c) Our responsibility to be the light

There are many ways that we can all bring light, and there are many forms of darkness that need to be dispelled.

Our lights are more powerful when we work together. This theme may inspire you to support charities and groups working to tackle identity-based violence and denial through membership, financial donations or volunteering.



A transport carriage on the unloading ramp at Auschwitz-Birkenau Extermination Centre, January 1945. © IWM HU 086524



**I had to bear witness even if I did it anonymously. Was I the only one? I wanted to find out, track down other witnesses, for someone who shouts alone is easily suspect. And that suspicion hurts.**

*Pierre Seel, gay survivor of Nazi Persecution*

# LOOKING FORWARD

Currently the world is dealing with the global pandemic of Covid-19. It is a time of great change and uncertainty for us all. Many are experiencing anxiety with the separation from family and friends; and some are taking an authoritarian approach and condemn others' behaviour. As we have noted, there is a proliferation of conspiracy theories about the pandemic, with minority groups targeted in many instances.

Yet this is also a time when so many people are bringing light to their neighbours and communities. Within days, 750,000 people signed up to volunteer for the NHS. In every corner of the country, mutual aid community groups, charities and neighbourhoods have joined together to provide help to their neighbours and communities - a beacon of hope in dark times.

Holocaust Memorial Day enables us to remember – for a purpose. It gives us a responsibility to work for a safer, better, future for everyone. Everyone can step up and use their talents to tackle prejudice, discrimination and intolerance wherever we encounter them.



The liberation of Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp, Germany, April 1945.  
© IWM FLM 3762



**Most people, whilst dimly aware that unfavourable things were happening to Jews in Germany, most people had not taken a lot of notice and I must say frankly that the same is true at the present time in parts of the world where dreadful things happen – most of us read the papers and then get on with our daily tasks, we don't spend all day thinking about it.**

Martin Kapel, *Kindertransportee*



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