1. Setting the scene

* Twenty years ago, in January 2000, the senior leaders of 46 countries met in Stockholm to discuss Holocaust education and remembrance

* At the end, they signed the Stockholm Declaration, which became the cornerstone for remembering the Holocaust around the world

* The declaration said that ‘the Holocaust shook the foundations of modern civilisation’ and that ‘the Holocaust must have a permanent place in our nation's collective memory’

* Then Prime Minister Tony Blair returned from Stockholm and established Holocaust Memorial Day in the UK

* Leaders and parties have come and gone since then, but the British government’s commitment to learning from the brutal truth of the Holocaust hasn’t changed

* Whatever their political beliefs or agendas, all MPs solidly unite – a rare sight in politics! –  on this cause and it is deeply encouraging
* Since that meeting in Stockholm twenty years ago, people in the UK started to take time to collectively remember the Holocaust on Holocaust Memorial Day

* At first it started in a small way: in 2006 there were 266 local events, held mostly in schools and civic centres. But today there are tens of thousands of commemorations – large and small – that take place all around the country in libraries, churches, mosques, offices, prisons, museums and more.

* And beyond the UK, from Argentina to Australia to Canada to Europe – people gather on the 27 January to remember

1. National Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre

* The UK leads the way internationally in marking Holocaust Memorial Day, and with our rich educational sector – yet there is no national Holocaust Memorial in our capital city.
* This is a big gap
* I am making this statement in support of the Memorial and learning centre as I believe that having the UK Holocaust Memorial will fill this gap
* ‘the Holocaust must have a permanent place in our nation’s collective memory’. It has this place through the annual Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations, but has no significant physical place. The Holocaust Memorial will fulfil this commitment.
* What is a memorial? A symbol of what we think is worth remembering. It outlasts us. It is a place of learning.
* The space could become the front of all this work
* The UK HMF could become the ideal place for us organise and hold the annual HMD ceremony
* There is a big, vibrant education and commemoration sector in the UK doing fantastic work for Holocaust education and commemoration.
* At HMDT, we are privileged to lead the Partnership Group with more than 20 different organisations who work hard for a big cause
* The Memorial and Learning Centre will help highlight and complement all the work taking place around the country

1. Today

* Learning about the Holocaust and recent genocides, and hearing from survivors can be deeply significant experiences
* On Holocaust Memorial Day, people who attend events learn more, empathise more and show more tolerance to anyone different from them

* People take action in their communities to make a better future – they are inspired to continue learning, they volunteer, they inform others
* We know that although the world said ‘never again’, there have been genocides since the Holocaust in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur

* We also know that antisemitism didn’t end after the Holocaust.
* Of course, Nazis also persecuted many other groups, like black people, Roma & Sinti people, disabled people, gay people
* Prejudice and hostility towards minority groups still exist: homophobia, anti-Roma sentiment, prejudice against disabled people, anti-Muslim hatred.
* We know that there is still so much hostility and division in the world today, and there are still places in the world where people are being persecuted for who they are

* We see reports of Uighur Muslims in China, shackled and blindfolded, being loaded onto trains, ‘re-educated’ away from their faith and culture

* And Rohingyas in Myanmar being stripped of their citizenships and persecuted

* There is still so much to warn about today and so many lessons to learn from what happened 75 years ago

* Because identity-based hostility isn’t a ‘Jewish issue’, or a ‘Muslim issue’ or a ‘black issue’. It is a problem of otherness, of being human and being shut out for who you are.

* We know that the Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre will be aligned with these priorities: to focus on the Holocaust, and to include, in the Learning Centre, information about all victims of Nazi Persecution and about recent genocides.

* This alignment in approach between the Government-established Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre and the Government-established Holocaust Memorial Day is entirely fitting

1. Summary

* The global pandemic and the economic crisis are challenging the very essence of remembering: How does one reflect on the past when the present is so overwhelming?
* In fact, it’s never been more urgent than now to be remind ourselves of where division, misinformation and fear can lead to

* This year is the 75 anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. We have reflected on what has been learnt since then, and how much more we still have, as a society, to learn in order to create a better future. We have looked back over these 75 years, and treasured the witness testimony that is still able to be shared with us.

* But this reflection over the past 75 years prompts questions: What will be here in 75 years’ time? What kind of society will we live in? What kind of people will we be? What will shape our learning?

* Most of us taking part in this Inquiry will probably not be here to answer these questions - but the Memorial can be.