

My name is Dr Toby Simpson and I hope to offer some useful comments today on the merits of the current proposal for a UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre. My comments reflect my position as Director of The Wiener Holocaust Library, and are grounded in the professional experience I have accrued over the past decade. I will now introduce the institution I represent as I believe it is relevant to the inquiry. The Wiener Holocaust Library is Britain's largest collection of evidence of the Holocaust and the Nazi era, and it is the oldest collection of its kind anywhere in the world. The Library began its existence in Amsterdam, and was initiated by a visionary founder, Dr Alfred Wiener. Wiener worked with several generations of dedicated and expert staff, including several eminent Jewish refugees from Nazism. As a result, Britain is blessed to have a world-class research library and archive on a subject of the utmost contemporary relevance. I am proud and privileged to lead this institution today, and to offer our submission to today's session.

The evidence that Wiener gathered in Amsterdam during the 1930s provided the foundation of the library's collections in London. The Library supported the Allied war effort, primarily as an information service. The information they provided concerned both the inner workings of the Nazi state and detailed reports of the escalating genocide of European Jews. After the war, Wiener's collections were brought to bear in the Nuremberg War Crimes Trials. In the decades thereafter the Library became an important centre of research.

Today, the Library has a global reputation as a source of world-leading scholarship. It regularly hosts exhibitions and events that prior to the pandemic were attracting over ten thousand people annually, and we continue to reach large numbers online with exhibitions and events. Indeed, the Wiener Holocaust Library's digital collections as a whole reach an estimated two million people online every year in over 200 countries. In 2017, Arts Council England recognised the Library's entire holdings as a Designated Collection of outstanding national significance.

As this summary suggests, the Library has for many decades played an important role in Holocaust remembrance, education and research in the UK. We made a submission to the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission in 2015, and have offered our expertise and support to UKHMF since it was established as an advisory body to government.

I will now move on from introducing myself and the institution I represent to commenting on the proposal.

The first point I want to comment on concerns the potential for the memorial to add value to the existing work being done in organisations and institutions like ours, which are actively engaged with Holocaust commemoration, research, and education. The report produced by the Prime Minister's Commission on the Holocaust pointed out the internationally recognised excellence of much of this provision, ranging from research centres like the Library, to museums like the Imperial War Museum, and educators like the Centre for Holocaust Education at UCL. UKHMF has explicitly recognised that there is therefore a clear need to engage intensively and productively with these organisations in order to ensure that this potential is realised. I am confident that the team working on developing the memorial will hold to this promise.

The substantial investment in the memorial represents a broader commitment, expressed in the Prime Minister's report, to secure the long-term future of Holocaust education in Britain. In this sense, the planned memorial also represents a plan to lift up and give more support to the work being done across the UK in a variety of contexts. Even though I have only been working in this area for a short time compared to some of the other speakers, I know that this represents a level of commitment and engagement from UK governments that has not

always been present. I represent an organisation whose history is interwoven with the trauma, suffering and extraordinary resilience of Jewish refugees from Nazism, often striving for recognition. There is profound meaning in ensuring that the memory of the victims of the Holocaust, victims the Roma genocide and other victims of Nazi persecution is permanently honoured. This is also a once in a lifetime opportunity for a new and more sustainable framework of education, research and remembrance to be established in this country, and that opportunity should not be missed.

In 2018, the previous Director of The Wiener Holocaust Library, Ben Barkow, who now chairs the UKHMF Academic Advisory Board, made a statement welcoming the Mission Statement of the UKHMF's plan and mission. I would like to reinforce the point he made then, that: "it is particularly good to see a commitment [in the proposal] to encouraging citizens to engage in critical reflection of the conduct of our government, Parliament and society during this darkest of times. Only by approaching history honestly - looking at the bad as well as the good - can we learn from the past in hope of creating a better future. We welcome promise of partnership with institutions like the Wiener Holocaust Library: such partnerships will be hugely mutually beneficial, strengthening the Memorial and its work, and bringing the resources of the Library and other institutions to the attention of more people."

Mr Barkow's point about the potential for partnership work is particularly important in my opinion. There is a clear need to maximise the impact of investment in Holocaust remembrance by making efficient use of limited resources, and a clear need to avoid reinventing the wheel in any area where there is existing provision. I do not believe that the proposal is incompatible with an efficient use of resources in the sector; rather I am optimistic that it will strengthen an overall commitment to a joined-up, strategic approach, while adding prominence through signposting to other institutions, while attracting more people to engage with the subject.

This brings me to my second to last point, regarding the planned location of the memorial and the symbolic value of that location as it relates to Holocaust memory. The Holocaust is widely recognised as the defining event of twentieth century European history, and as the worst and most extreme atrocity perpetrated in the history of human civilisation. In my view, it is fitting for the memorial to be located in a position of the greatest possible prominence to reflect that fact.

The Holocaust is a profoundly disturbing subject. It is nevertheless a subject we must all confront and learn about if we wish to become full and responsible citizens in the twenty first century. We need to do so in order to make sense of the world, with all of its rich humanity along with its bewildering and often shocking inhumanity. We cannot escape the fact that the history of the Holocaust is complex and often difficult to get to grips with; we also cannot escape the fact that it is a powerfully emotive and resonant and, sadly, highly relevant today as we strive to fight the rising tide of intolerance, antisemitism, racism and prejudice.

The choice of location and design is therefore a difficult challenge to rise to, and in my view the proposal achieves its most important aims. It is sensitive, it is evocative, it is prominent and it is appropriate. I would echo Sir David Adjaye's view that the chosen location 'emphasises [the Memorial's] importance as a public space in dialogue with its cultural, political and historic surroundings'. I do not agree that it encourages a falsely celebratory narrative of Britain's relationship to the Holocaust. I think this is to impose an interpretation on the memorial that is in fact neither inherent in its design nor in its location.

The last point I wish to make is brief, but important nonetheless. I have full confidence in the UKHMF Academic Advisory Board and its current curation team to develop the content of

the Learning centre in such a way that it will meet an extremely high standard and reflect an honest appraisal of the history of the Holocaust, the Nazi era and other genocides, including those aspects which ask us remember or reflect on uncomfortable truths. I worked with the Advisory Board's Chair, Ben Barkow, for many years while he was Director of the Library and I know him to be an individual of integrity who has always rejected the notion that it is acceptable to view history through rose-tinted spectacles or to manipulate it for political ends. I will therefore conclude by saying that I look forward to the prospect of working with UKHMF to ensure that this project realises its full potential.