



Statement of Paul A. Shapiro
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By way of introduction: I am currently the Director of International Affairs and Founding Director (Emeritus) of the Mandel Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM). I have been involved with the development of our Museum since 1989, first on a voluntary basis, and since 1997 as a permanent member of the Museum's staff. I served before that as the editor in chief of Columbia University's *Journal of International Affairs* (New York) and during the Cold War as editor of a US Government-sponsored journal on communist affairs. In the 1970s, I carried out the historical research that led to the first successful denaturalization and expulsion from the United States of a fascist leader who had entered the country illegally after the war. I have served on multiple exhibition development committees; represented our Museum at the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA); led the Museum's campaign to open the archives of the International Tracing Service (a copy of which now resides at the Wiener Library); wrote major sections of the *Final Report* of the International Commission on the Holocaust in Romania, which was chaired by Elie Wiesel; and served on the US Government's Inter-Agency Working Group on Nazi-Era Crimes, which oversaw the declassification of millions of documents from US Government archives that dealt with American awareness of the Holocaust when it was taking place and postwar American attitudes toward and treatment of both Holocaust survivors and Holocaust perpetrators. In recent

months I have had the privilege of participating in the deliberations of the Academic Advisory Board of the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial (UKHM).

I appreciate the opportunity to address this Inquiry. I admire the decency, decorum, and intensity with which the matters before the Inquiry are being explored—by the Public Inquirer, by presenters, and by the distinguished attorneys whose questions do so much to clarify the issues. Your process is testimony to what it takes to get it right in a democratic system. I hope to offer some useful perspective on the issues before you.

Several presenters during the first days of the Inquiry asserted that the proposed United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial would have great national and great *international* significance. My statement focuses on the international. I plan a) to bring an international/transatlantic comparative perspective to your deliberations and b) to share information that may be of use regarding other new national holocaust memorials that are in the planning stages in Europe today. The Holocaust was a continent-wide European phenomenon with global consequences. International perspective on your national enterprise is essential, especially because what Britain does has international significance that is unmatched by most other countries.

Like the United Kingdom, the United States was spared Axis occupation and thus spared the heinous crimes of the Holocaust on its own territory.¹ It is thus perhaps not surprising that the very issues being discussed by this Inquiry—relating to content, relevance, and location in the absence of an actual Holocaust site—materialized in a very similar manner as plans for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum were being made. In 1978, a planned march by the American Nazi Party in Skokie, Illinois, home to a large community of Holocaust survivors, the shocking public acknowledgement that hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Nazis, including Holocaust perpetrators, had come to the United States after the war, and the television miniseries *The Holocaust* combined to increase public sensitivity to the horrors of the Holocaust and challenge the comfortable notion—the myth—that the United States had little to do with the Holocaust. Jimmy Carter appointed a commission to explore the possibility of creating a national Holocaust memorial. When the report of the President’s Commission on the Holocaust was made public in 1979 it incorporated mandates not only to memorialize the victims in a museum in Washington, but also to educate about the Holocaust and the persecution of other groups that the Nazis had targeted on racial grounds, with the goal to “remind contemporary generations of the dangers of indifference.”

The report elicited considerable public criticism. Some critics asserted that emphasizing the dark potential of which humans are capable, epitomized by the Holocaust, in the midst of the many monuments to human and national achievement located in the national capital would be inappropriate. Better, the argument ran, to reconsider the entire enterprise or, failing that, to construct the memorial in some other city. Other critics argued that the Holocaust was a

¹ The Channel Islands constituting an exception.

European event, not one central to the American experience, and that efforts to make a Holocaust museum relevant for Americans would fail. Still others made less savory arguments, that the museum would constitute “a Jewish intrusion on American space,” arguments that reflected the legacy of the prejudice, stereotyping, and antisemitism that had been prevalent enough in American society in the 1930s and 1940s to have had a clear impact on American policy during the Holocaust itself.

You can see the parallels. The resurgence of antisemitism in our own time, including in the United Kingdom, the visceral hatred, or at least wariness, of immigrants and refugees that taints governmental responses today on both sides of the Atlantic, and powerful recent scholarship that has clarified the degree to which the actions or the inaction of countries other than Germany contributed to the magnitude of the mass murder of European Jewry that occurred: These factors have provided impetus for the creation of the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial. Criticism of the initiative has also been similar. It would not be appropriate to place a monument to evil at the heart of British democracy. Perhaps another city would do. Better to spend the money on something else entirely. Or, how relevant can a memorial about the Holocaust of the Jews be in a country that was a safe haven and, like the United States, a major contributor to the military defeat of Nazi Germany and her allies?

The issue of *relevance*, of course, relates to the *content* that one intends to emphasize. Here, too, there are interesting parallels. Far from self-glorification, the President’s Commission in the United States cited the “distinct responsibility” to address America’s “disastrous indifference” to the fate of the Jews of Europe. The United Kingdom Commission’s purposeful call to address the “ambiguity” of Britain’s response similarly requires honest confrontation with the country’s record at a time when millions of lives were at stake. The planned focus of the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial on the British interface with the rise of Nazism, the Holocaust, and the postwar legacy of genocide promises to fulfill this commitment to explore the country’s record, warts and all.

It is this focus on Britain’s interface with the Holocaust that very clearly distinguishes the content and potential of the new Memorial from the approach of the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum. Furthermore, the antisemitism that was a central element of Nazi ideology existed long before the war and was utilized by Germany from the Nazi rise to power in 1933 onward to build support both inside Germany and throughout much of the rest of Europe. Germany’s persecution and spoliation of Jews also preceded the war, as did British decisions of enormous consequence for European Jewry. It would be a mistake to portray the Holocaust solely in a wartime or military history context, just as it would be too confining to see it solely as part of Jewish history or of German history. It is part of British history as well. That is the point that the Memorial aspires to bring home to visitors, challenging visitors to “reflect on whether more could have been done, both by policymakers and by society as a whole.” That is why decisions regarding the *location* of the Memorial are so critical.

Twelve locations in Washington, including several existing historic buildings in the city's downtown, were explored initially as possible sites for the new museum. The site where the Museum stands today was not one of the twelve. When the transfer to the Museum of its present site, adjacent to the National Mall, in the shadow of the Washington Monument, and in the most visited tourist area of the city was made, controversy erupted. The National Capital Planning Commission protested that some procedural steps—steps not required, but generally applied to Federal government land transfers—had not been followed. When public announcement of the site was made, additional objections emerged. Critics proclaimed that monuments to Native Americans and Black Americans should be built first.² Others argued that it would be impossible for the Museum to address honestly “American hypocrisy” during the Holocaust, and still others feared that the new institution would glorify the American record and that of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Still others insisted that Holocaust survivors should instead “build a memorial to the American dead who gave their lives to free them.” Some members of the Jewish community feared that resentment of what would be perceived as a Jewish presence on the National Mall would spark a new wave of antisemitism.

The most prevalent criticism in the letters and editorials that followed the announcement, however, was that the Museum would be misplaced on the National Mall because the Holocaust was “not an American event.” The celebratory institutions on the National Mall, wrote one author, should not be “confronted by a morbid reminder of a genocidal crime committed by an alien tyranny on another continent.” Some commentators suggested that the right place for such a memorial would be Germany or Austria. A letter to *Time* magazine declared that such a museum would be “highly appropriate in Jerusalem, where it would be more relevant.” In short, the suggestion was to implement the recommendations of the President's Commission as far away as possible from where Americans and international visitors to our national capital might see it and, hopefully, come away with a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both citizens and government in times of crisis.

Despite all of this criticism, the Museum's planners and supporters in both the White House and the US Congress determined that it was crucially important for the Museum to be built in the “memorial core” of the nation, as “a warning and a lesson” in a country that saw itself as a “standard-bearer of freedom and human rights.” Highly respected columnist George Will wrote that “No other nation more needs citizens trained to look life in the face.” A focus group concluded that the site was essential to “impress upon visitors the need to take personal responsibility for issues usually deemed affairs of state.” Civil rights icon Bayard Rustin argued in the *New York Times* that located in “the center of our democracy” the new museum would

² In fact a reverse dynamic occurred. The enthusiastic response to the USHMM following its opening in 1993 helped to stimulate initiatives that led to the creation of both the National Museum of the American Indian, which opened on the National Mall in 2004 and the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened on the Mall in 2016.

stand as a “warning against hatred and dehumanization whoever is the victim.”³ I could continue, but the parallels to the issues being examined and the opinions being expressed to this Inquiry are clear.

Let me conclude this transatlantic analogy with a word about the consequences of America’s decision regarding the location of our national Holocaust memorial. Since the Museum opened in 1993 over 45 million people have visited our permanent exhibition, 25 percent of them school students, 12 percent international visitors, and approximately 90 percent non-Jewish. Visitors have included over 100 heads of state and more than 3,500 other high-level foreign officials from over 132 countries. In 2019 our web site was accessed by 19.8 million visitors from more than 238 countries and territories. The Museum has huge Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and E-mail Community followings. The Museum’s prominence on the national map has stimulated Holocaust education across the country, reaching students, teachers, as well as leaders in the American military, judiciary, law enforcement, and government communities. Programs for professionals examine the Holocaust so as to give participants insight into their own professional and individual responsibilities today. The Museum has presented multiple special exhibitions to the public, including exhibitions that through Holocaust history address the power of propaganda and hate speech; medical ethics; collaboration, complicity and the effects of inaction; and America’s interface with the Holocaust. Over 900 university faculty, including from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) and majority Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSI), have participated in teaching seminars offered by the Museum’s scholarly center, and over 675 scholars from 34 countries have plumbed the Museum’s huge research collections to prepare doctoral dissertations and post-doctoral publications while on fellowships-in-residence at the Museum. The Museum’s center for prevention of genocide has educated the public about contemporary genocides and has affected official US policy through successful advocacy that resulted in the establishment of a US Government interagency Atrocities Prevention Board.

Our international impact has included a role in founding the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, leadership in opening of the International Tracing Service archives, participation in the activities of the European Holocaust Research Initiative, and multiple involvements at the national level in many countries. America’s willingness to confront its own history during the Holocaust certainly impresses foreign visitors. It makes a statement about the importance of facing the truth in a democracy, and of course provides us with a firm foundation from which to encourage other countries to do the same. Just how important this open confrontation with one’s own history is was reinforced for me when the German Minister of Culture, who bears responsibility for most of the Federal Republic’s Holocaust-related institutional infrastructure and budget, as well as the then very hot art restitution issue, visited Washington in 2016. The Minister came to the Museum with a sizeable contingent of German

³ This history of the creation of the Museum, as well as ample references to commentary regarding the location of the Museum on the National Mall, is drawn from Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America’s Holocaust Museum* (New York, Viking Penguin, 1995).

media. As we began a visit to our permanent exhibition, she asked me to concentrate on the sections of the exhibition that relate to US policy at the time—US immigration restrictions, the turning away of the 937 mostly-Jewish refugees on the ocean liner St. Louis in early 1939, after Kristallnacht, the refusal to bomb Auschwitz and the rail lines daily carrying thousands of Jews to their deaths, and the extensive newspaper coverage that provided Americans with ample access to information about the persecution and murder of European Jews. It was this willingness to confront one's own national past, warts and all, that the Minister wanted to impress on her senior staff and wanted the media traveling with her to report on. Stopping as we crossed one of the Museum's glass bridges and caught site of the Washington Monument, she emphasized to the reporters who surrounded her that it was important to absorb this American example and to know that laying before the public an honest picture of the dark parts of one's past can only reinforce the strength and legitimacy of one's democracy. The Archbishop of Canterbury has endorsed the Memorial plan to "present opportunities to learn what we did wrong, as well as to celebrate what we did right." Speaking from another faith tradition, Imam Asim considered that the Victoria Tower Garden site is "critical" to achieving this.

Having laid out the transatlantic similarities of experience as our two countries developed plans to construct national Holocaust memorials, I want also to present some information regarding new Holocaust memorial institutions that are being planned right now on the continent, thus providing context that is nearer both geographically and chronologically to the British initiative.

In Kyiv, Ukraine, an intense debate has unfolded relating to the creation of a memorial at the Babyn Yar ravine, surely one of the two or three most iconic authentic Holocaust sites, a site where over two days in late September 1941 more than 33,000 Ukrainian Jews were systematically murdered by German killers, assisted by local Ukrainian militia and police. A private initiative to build a Babyn Yar Holocaust Memorial Center (BYHMC) at the site received early endorsement by then President Poroshenko of Ukraine, but no formal government involvement or public funding. The backgrounds of some of the principal funders of the initiative raised questions from the start, and a number of managerial missteps also derailed the significant early progress that had been made, which included a historical narrative that was true to the history of what happened there and focused on the murder of those tens of thousands of Jews. Because Babyn Yar is an authentic Holocaust site, the location of the memorial within the perimeter of the site was not in question. This has not meant, however, an absence of criticism and controversy. During the long German occupation of Ukraine, the Babyn Yar ravine became a site of execution of sixty to seventy thousand additional victims of Nazi brutality—communists, prisoners of war, individuals who became suspect in the occupiers' eyes, and even several dozen Ukrainian nationalists who had collaborated with the Germans, including in the murder of Jews, but who turned against the Germans when they understood that Germany had no intention of establishing an independent Ukraine. The director of Ukraine's Institute of National Memory attacked the BYHMC plan, insisting that any new memorial had to memorialize in equal measure all of the victims shot into the ravine, and in particular the small number of nationalists

who met their fate there. With this governmental authority opening the door to relativizing and diminishing the significance of the Holocaust murders that had taken place at the site, a team at the Institute of History of the National Academy of Ukraine, under auspices of the Ministry of Culture, developed an alternate plan for the site. The word Holocaust does not appear in the title of the plan, and the plan itself relativizes the Holocaust, equating Nazism and communism, and suggesting equal treatment of the 33,000 Jewish victims at the site and the few dozen nationalists killed there. By proposing to cover the history of Babyn Yar from ancient times through the Soviet postwar period, with dozens of extraneous topics from a 2000-year history requiring attention, this “official” plan in effect buries the Holocaust. As if to clarify the less seemly intent of some proponents, the plan also calls for investigation of the “anti-Ukrainian” motives of Jews who advocate the establishment of a Babyn Yar memorial that would actually focus on the Holocaust.⁴

In Ukraine, the site is not contested. But dozens everything possible is being suggested to avoid the authentic confrontation with the Holocaust and the learning experience that, in London, the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial has the potential to deliver.

The situation in Bucharest, Romania, is different yet again. Since the early 2000s presidents and prime ministers of Romania have all supported significant efforts to have that country learn about and learn from its Holocaust history. Treated as a taboo subject during the communist era, Romania had a long history of antisemitism and was the second perpetrator country in Europe, after Germany, in terms of the number of Jews murdered by its own government, military and police forces. Thus it is striking that it was under Romanian chairmanship that the 34 member countries of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance crafted the working definition of antisemitism that has since been adopted by many national governments and international organizations worldwide. With the country once home to nearly one million Jews and now to just a few thousand, the Romanian government is supporting with staff and significant funding the creation of a National Museum of the History of Romanian Jews and the Holocaust. But in Bucharest, the location of the museum became a hotly contested public issue. When the Mayor of Bucharest designated an ornate, prominent, city-owned building in Bucharest’s historic old quarter to serve as the museum site, the decision was first challenged on procedural grounds. Then editorials appeared noting that an antisemitic 19th century Romanian poet had once worked in the building, and asserting that it would insult the dead poet’s memory to install a memorial to Jews there. The deputy mayor publicly stated that it would be better if the new museum could be located away from any symbol of Romanianism, specifically suggesting “the Jewish quarter” of the city, though that quarter had been nearly totally destroyed during the Ceausescu regime. A second site was proposed, close to the headquarters of the Government and between two existing national museums (Museum of the Romanian Peasant, Museum of Natural History). Members of

⁴ See Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, Institute of History of Ukraine, National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, *National Historical Memorial Preserve Babyn Yar: Concept of the Complex Memorialization of Babyn Yar with Extending Borders of the National Historical Preserve Babyn Yar* (Kyiv, 2019), 108 pp.

the Romanian Academy protested this intrusion of a “foreign” subject into Romania’s cultural landscape. The director of the Museum of Natural History brushed off a decades-old plan to expand that 100-year-old museum and claimed to have urgent need of the vacant and overgrown lot in question. Despite all of this, the Government of Romania demonstrated its commitment by providing a huge seven-story building on Bucharest’s most historic boulevard, Calea Victoriei, which runs from the square where the Government headquarters are located and the former royal palace, now the National Museum of Art. Neighbors include art museums, the George Enescu Museum, and not incidently, the Romanian Academy. To forestall any additional delay, the Parliament passed a special law allocating the site, and an international exhibition design competition is currently underway.

In light of the cases I have presented, one can conclude that very similar arguments against the establishment of Holocaust memorials appear even in countries with quite different histories, social structures, and governmental traditions. There is also a spectrum along which one can place the experiences of Holocaust memorial initiatives. At one end one might see winning the day denial of the need for any memorial at all; procedural arguments overwhelming noble purpose; insistence on the inappropriateness of any central location, and even moreso any central location actually under consideration, as too revealing of one’s national history, or for people of prejudice, just too “Jewish”; and, if all else fails, the argument that there was nothing so unprecedented or horrific about the Holocaust that would justify dealing with it at all, and certainly not before dealing with other issues, and definitely not without seeking to submerge the uncomfortable topic of the Holocaust to near invisibility. The Ukrainian case today would be located somewhere toward that end of the spectrum, with the clear risk that no memorial or an ineffective one may ultimately materialize.

At the other end of the spectrum one would have to posit an instance where none of these arguments, procedural, content- or location-related, occurred. To my knowledge there has never been such a case, but it is theoretically possible. The Romanian initiative to create a Museum of the History of Romanian Jews and the Holocaust has encountered serious challenges and delays, though the content of the museum has been secure from early on. Today it is clearly moving from dead-center on the spectrum, where it was stalled by arguments regarding an appropriate site, toward the positive end. The American experience, in my judgment, always resided nearer the positive end of the spectrum, with the positive outcomes that I have described earlier. At every key turning point, procedural issues, delicate content issues, and site selection issues were resolved in a way that not only did not cause the project to stall, but impelled it toward completion and high impact. This Public Inquiry will play a role in determining where on this hypothetical spectrum the initiative to create a national Holocaust memorial in the United Kingdom stands today and the direction it is headed along the spectrum.

There can be no question that when dealing with a site that is not itself an authentic Holocaust site, location plays a major role in predestining degrees of success and, conversely, the potential for failure to achieve a memorial’s goals. The founding director of the Museum in Washington

insisted that the Museum's primary educational goal was to educate "bystanders." Locating the Museum among other national museums on the National Mall was essential to attracting the 90 percent of American visitors to the Museum who are not Jewish and who, but for the placement of the Museum so squarely in our national monumental core, would have had no immediate reason to identify the Holocaust as part of their story and of personal importance to them. Making the Holocaust part of the American experience has fostered success that would have been impossible elsewhere.

From an international perspective, the impact is similar. It is one thing to insist to a foreign official or foreign visitor that it is important to preserve the memory of the Holocaust and confront one's own Holocaust history, and that doing so reflects a national commitment to stand up against antisemitism, prejudice and hatred in all its forms. They may or may not choose to believe you. It is quite something else when they see that you have had the courage—the deep commitment required—to place a national memorial to the Holocaust in the midst of your most emblematic national memorials, for all the world, and for one's own citizens to see. Moving the memorial elsewhere will inevitably diminish its educational power and reach, and raise questions regarding the national commitment to memorializing the victims and teaching the lessons of the Holocaust.

In our permanent exhibition, the Washington Museum provided windows into America's failures during the Holocaust era. But it took 25 years for us to provide the public with the extensive exploration of the consequences of American governmental decisions and social and political realities in that era that we now provide in a special exhibit on "Americans and the Holocaust." The United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial team is making the exploration of the Holocaust as part of British history the core focus of the new Memorial's learning center. It is bold and courageous to do so, and justifies ensuring that the Memorial's unique content stands on its own, without the risk of subordination to priorities or constraints of other institutions. The Memorial will add a new partner, a complement not a competitor, to the impressive network of related institutions that this country already supports—the Wiener Library, the Imperial War Museum, the Holocaust Education Trust. You are engaged in an endeavor that has the potential to improve British society and the world. I encourage this Inquiry to recommend the resolution of outstanding issues in a manner that impels the project toward timely completion.