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Members of the House of Lords
London
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04.06.25

Dear Members of the House of Lords

We have been asked to comment on the proposed Holocaust Memorial & Learning Centre next to Parliament, and are grateful for the opportunity to do so. Please allow us to provide some context for the opinions we express in this letter.

We support UKHMF's long stated desire that its new Centre helps to 'raise the ships' in UK Holocaust education. We are one of those ships. In 1995 we became Britain's first place of Holocaust remembrance, and to date remain its only museum wholly dedicated to the Holocaust. We are a National Portfolio Organisation funded by Arts Council England, with nationally styled accreditation. We are also the only Holocaust museum in the world founded by Christians - Stephen, James and Marina Smith.

Our organisation began when the Smith family opened their home to hundreds of Holocaust survivors, who came to regard it as a home from home. Around this unique interfaith bond, they built powerful Holocaust exhibitions and beautiful memorial gardens. Some 35,000 schoolchildren and adults visit our Museum each year to experience a living, breathing model of good citizenship which debunks conspiracy theories; de-others; and nurtures an appreciation of difference.

From our vibrant base in central England, we also take touring exhibitions and education programmes far and wide nationally and internationally. In recent years we have become known for thought-provoking programmes and exhibitions - including the recent *Vicious Circle* funded by MHCLG, which draws parallels between the ideology of the Nazis and the anti-Jewish ideologies of today.

We write to express our support for a Holocaust Memorial & Learning Centre at Westminster which builds on these strengths, dovetailing its work with other existing places of physical



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Holocaust remembrance and education around the country. We view this as an opportunity for the British state to remember the Holocaust as a unique catastrophe borne of a pan-European belief system which British culture, and the English language, helped to shape over many centuries. Our own central England location is a reminder of the medieval British influence seated in Nottingham, Lincoln and Leicester which strongly drove that anti-Jewish belief system.

We lend our support in the hope that the UKHMF is now in a position to set out how the new Westminster centre intends to build on, and coordinate with, the tangible assets and sense of place which we and others such as the Wiener Library, Holocaust Centre North and Lake Windermere Holocaust Project offer. In our case, we bring to bear a treasure trove of artefacts, art, photographs, testimonies and educational resources such as *The Forever Project* — Europe's first ever collection of interactive Holocaust survivor testimonies launched in 2016.

In the aftermath of October 7, collaboration in defining, updating and delivering UK Holocaust education is something we believe can be accelerated by the new Centre.

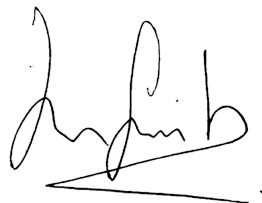
In anticipation of a new era of collaboration, we look forward to a London Centre which works **with** the National Holocaust Museum, multiplying the effectiveness of our own work and of other under-funded peers. (Please see newspaper article attached).

We would be pleased to participate in the formulation of concrete plans which realise this desire for collaboration, which we appreciate has always been UKHMF's intention.

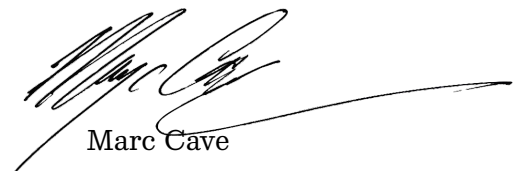
Your sincerely,



Henry Grunwald OBE KC
Chairman



Dr James Smith CBE
Co-Founder & Life President



Marc Cave
Director

Today in Westminster, Britain's remaining Holocaust survivors will gather to mark [Holocaust Memorial Day](#), on the eightieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. Politicians of every stripe are due alongside them, whether motivated by moral commitment, political presentee-ism or a desire to grab face time with the King, a longstanding patron of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust.

Sitting among those survivors will be Ivor Perl, a gracious man just shy of his 93 birthday. Born into an Orthodox Jewish family in Makó, southern Hungary – not far from where some of my own maternal family were also deported – Perl was 12 years old when he arrived in [Auschwitz](#). He escaped immediate selection for murder in the camps’ gas chambers, alongside his mother and siblings, by pretending to be 16 and capable of work. [Emma Barnett wrote for this newspaper yesterday about interviewing Perl for the *Today* programme.](#)

Holocaust Memorial Day has been formally marked in the UK since 2001. [Holocaust](#) education has been a compulsory component of state school curricula since 1991, with an expanded programme mandated in 1995. Yet antisemitism, or anti-Jewish racism as some call it, has not fallen but continues to rise.

I am not writing, in this instance, about deniable incidents – over which reasonable people can sometimes disagree – where legitimate criticism of Israel's appalling government seems to some of us to blur with ancient anti-Jewish stereotypes. I am writing about attacks on Jewish children, for the crime of being visibly Jewish. Over the past year, children travelling to Jewish schools have been attacked with broken glass bottles, beaten up in tube stations and harassed as their school buses are pelted with stones.



Holocaust survivors take part in the ceremony to mark the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oswiecim, Poland (Photo: Anadolu)

This is just the quotidian experience of Jewish life under threat. There are darker cases. In June of last year, 19-year-old Mason Reynolds was jailed for eight years for preparing to carry out a suicide bomb attack on a synagogue in Hove. Roberts, an ideological antisemite clearly influenced by neo-Nazis such as Brenton Tarrant in New Zealand, and Anders Breivik in Norway, said that he wanted “to make Jews afraid again”.

Jews are afraid again. The Community Security Trust, which monitors anti-Jewish threats and provides the necessary security that you experience if you visit any Jewish building or event in the UK, reported 1,978 [antisemitic incidents](#) across their threat radar from January – June 2024. Ten years ago, there were only 310 such incidents in the same period. In other words, the number of antisemitic threats in this country has in a decade increased by a factor of more than six. Throughout that time, and for the twenty years previously, every British child has been dutifully taught in Key Stage 3 to deplore the Holocaust.

Against this background, we have to face up to an uncomfortable truth. If Holocaust education was intended to combat antisemitism, it has failed.

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In part, this failure is down to British schools’ obtuse insistence on presenting the Holocaust, the apex in reality of centuries of anti-Jewish racism in Europe, as a historical moment boundaried by the Second World War between Britain, with her Allies, and Germans. Millennials like myself, whose lessons were shaped by the Holocaust education trends of the 1990s, were taught that antisemitism was a German phenomenon. Privately, those of us with roots in Eastern Europe knew that Nazi forces were abetted by local antisemites in every central or Eastern European nation they reached.

Ivor Perl, in earlier interviews, has spoken of his bewilderment at the British school children who ask him regularly if life has taught him to hate Germans. “People always ask me if I hate Germans, but it was the Hungarian boys I used to play football with in my home town who rounded us up into the ghetto with sticks.” The British belief that antisemitism was a German disease, opposed when necessary by a heroic British nation, has protected us from looking too closely at another British reality: that the next time anti-Jewish racism bubbles over into overt persecution, it could be here.

One admirable museum exhibition, launched this week in London, seeks to combat this Holocaust myth-making. The National Holocaust Museum is based in Nottinghamshire, close to a reminder of England's own anti-Jewish past. The first blood-libels, false accusations that Jewish rituals require the murder of Christian children, took place nearby in Norwich and Lincoln.



Polish President Andrzej Duda walks through the camp area during the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau (Photo: Agencja Wyborcza.pl/Grzegorz Celejewski via Reuters)

The complete extermination of many medieval Jewish communities followed these accusations, long pre-dating the European Holocaust. The Museum’s *Vicious Cycle* exhibition, which is touring more widely, seeks to place the Holocaust in the context of that long history of anti-Jewish violence, building its story around five historic pogroms and two thousand years of ethnic cleansing.

To Marc Cave, director of the National Holocaust Museum, this history of persecution doesn’t make the Jews pariahs. Each panel of this tiny, circular exhibit is intersected by a beautiful object which reflects Jewish communities at their most flourishing, even in communities, such as the Baghdad of 1941, which would ultimately expel them. One panel tells the story of the Farhud of 1941 – the term is “violent dispossession” in Arabic – in which pro-Nazi Arabs destroyed 900 houses in Jewish neighbourhoods.

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Vicious Cycle doesn’t pull its punches. Nor does it shy away from locating the Jewish people’s roots in the Middle East. According to the exhibition’s supporters, political goodwill behind a proposal to host the exhibit in Westminster Hall seemed to dry up after the Museum revealed that it would include a panel tying the rhetoric of Hamas leader Yahya al-Sinwar to ancient antisemitic rhetoric about the benefits of ridding the world of Jews.

As Cave points out, the rhetoric of Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood is only the latest

iteration of a long line of “false prophets”: those who justify their anti-Jewish violence with a utopian vision of a world rid of one race of a people. To frame Jews as the “flaw in the universe”, they must be considered parasitical, without a homeland, and hungry for blood themselves.

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Exhibitions like *Vicious Cycle* cannot solve the problem alone. For a start, they are rare, tiny and underfunded: in London, you have to visit a dingy basement in a vacant building to view the exhibition. (After passing security, of course.) But they do point the way where school-mandated Holocaust education has long failed.

The liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau does not belong in a parade of anniversaries celebrating British successes against a wicked German enemy. When we remember the Holocaust, we must understand ourselves as remembering two millennia of anti-Jewish violence across Europe and the Middle East. Only when we understand the full history of anti-Jewish prejudice can we begin to define it.

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