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Learning - Charity - Community

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HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY 27/1

# Holocaust Memorial Day 2025

## THE HOLOCAUST

**The Holocaust (The Shoah in Hebrew) was the attempt by the Nazis and their collaborators to murder all the Jews in Europe. From the time they assumed power in Germany in 1933, the Nazis used propaganda, persecution, and legislation to deny human and civil rights to German Jews. They used centuries of antisemitism (anti-Jewish hatred) as their foundation.**

**With the outbreak of World War Two in 1939 Germany invaded Poland, subjecting around 2 million Polish Jews to violence and forced labour. Thousands of Jews were murdered in the first months of the occupation. Shortly after the occupation Polish Jews were confined to particular neighbourhoods that came to be known as 'ghettos'. Living conditions in these ghettos were appalling - a deliberate attempt by the Nazis to cause the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Jews. This approach was repeated across Eastern Europe in other countries occupied by the Nazis.**

**In 1941, the systematic murder of Europe's Jews began - a plan known by the Nazis as 'The Final Solution to the Jewish Problem'. Death squads called *Einsatzgruppen* swept Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, killing Jews by firing squad. By the end of 1941 the first death camp, Chelmno in Poland, had been established, giving the Nazis their method to continue murdering on a giant scale. Five other death camps followed; Treblinka; Belzec, Majdanek, Sobibor and Auschwitz Birkenau. Others were sent to concentration camps where they were used as slave labour.**

**By the end of the Holocaust, 6 million Jewish men, women and children had been murdered in ghettos, mass-shootings, in concentration camps and death camps.**

# NAZI PERSECUTION OF OTHER GROUPS: 1933 - 1945

In addition to singling out Jews for complete annihilation, the Nazis targeted for discrimination and persecution, anyone they believed threatened their ideal of a 'pure Aryan race'.

Nazi beliefs categorised people by race, and Hitler used the word 'Aryan' for his idea of a 'pure German race'. The Nazis believed Aryan people were superior to all others. Their devotion to what they believed was racial purity and their opposition to racial mixing partly explains their hatred towards Jews, Roma and Sinti people and black people. Slavic people, such as those from Poland and Russia, were considered inferior and were targeted because they lived in areas needed for German expansion.

The Nazis wanted to 'improve' the genetic make-up of the population and so persecuted people they deemed to be disabled, either mentally or physically, as well as gay people. Political opponents, primarily communists, trade unionists and social democrats, as well as those whose religious beliefs conflicted with Nazi ideology, such as Jehovah's Witnesses, were also targeted for persecution.

Hundreds of thousands of lives were destroyed because of Nazi persecution of other groups, and many groups did not receive acknowledgement of their suffering until years after 1945.

# WHAT IS HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY?

The enormity of the Holocaust is recognised across the world, and it serves as an example of the horrors of genocide and how certain behaviours can lead to it happening. But sadly, the Holocaust is not the only genocide that has happened in history. In Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur millions of people have been killed because of who they are.

Every year on the 27th of January, people in the UK mark Holocaust Memorial Day.
It is held on this date because this is when the largest Nazi concentration camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, was liberated by soldiers of the Soviet Army in 1945.

Holocaust Memorial Day is the international day to remember the six million Jews murdered during the Holocaust, alongside the millions of people murdered under Nazi persecution of other groups and during more recent genocides around the world.

It highlights how important it is to be tolerant of other people's beliefs and differences, and not to exclude people or spread messages of hate. It also helps us to never forget the events of the Holocaust so that we can try to stop anything like it from happening again.

# HMD 2025 THEME: FOR A BETTER FUTURE

**This Holocaust Memorial Day marks the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the largest Nazi concentration camp complex, and the 30th anniversary of the genocide in Bosnia. 80 years on from the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, antisemitism (anti-Jewish hatred) has increased significantly in the UK and globally following the 7 October attacks in Israel by Hamas and the subsequent war in Gaza. Many UK communities are feeling vulnerable, with hostility and suspicion of others rising. Hopefully, HMD 2025 can be an opportunity for people to come together, learn both from and about the past, and take actions to make a better future.**

**Holocaust denial and distortion are both forms of antisemitism (anti-Jewish hatred) and should be confronted. 80 years on from the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, as living witnesses rely on us to carry forward their legacy, silence must not be an option. The Holocaust threatened the fabric of civilisation, and discrimination and persecution must still be resisted every day. Our world often feels fragile and vulnerable, and we cannot be complacent. Wherever it takes place, including in the UK, prejudice and the language of hatred must be challenged by us all.**

## FIRST THEY CAME -

## PASTOR MARTIN NIEMÖLLER

First they came for the Communists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist
Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist
Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me.

**'First They Came' is a haunting and impactful poem that drives home the consequences of remaining silent when witnessing the targeting of different groups. It is one of the most famous poems about the Holocaust and was written by Pastor Martin Niemöller. Initially an antisemitic Nazi supporter, his views changed when he was imprisoned in a concentration camp for speaking out against Nazi control of churches. He was freed in 1945 and became a leading voice for peace after the war and encouraged Germans to take responsibility for Nazi atrocities.**