

Holocaust Memorial Day - How Can Life Go On?

This Friday will mark 72 years since the liberation of Auschwitz concentration camp in 1945. Since 2001, Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) has taken place in the UK; a day dedicated to the remembrance of those who were killed in the Holocaust and subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia and Darfur.

'How can life go on?' is the theme of this year's Holocaust Memorial Day. How did life continue for the survivors of the Holocaust? I have had the honour of meeting a number of survivors and I know many who struggled to tell their story for a number of years. It must still feel impossible to come to terms with what happened. But it is our responsibility to rebuild and unite, ensuring that life can go on for those who survived and continue to survive genocides. Yet we must ask ourselves the question: are we taking responsibility today?

There are hundreds of stories of individuals who survived the Holocaust. No story is the same as the next. But what these survivors have in common is that in the face of extreme prejudice, discrimination and ultimately extermination, they lived and therefore won.

Following the Holocaust, many Jews, LGBT+ people, disabled people, political dissidents and countless other victims of Nazi persecution had been displaced from their homes with nowhere to go, many with no family to continue their life with. Many needed urgent medical support, both physical and mental. In the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust, it wasn't simply a question of *how*, it was also a question of *where* must life go on.

Having witnessed and been subjected to the atrocities of the Holocaust, many survivors found it difficult to continue their life as normal in the years that followed. Having had their mothers, fathers, sons and daughters, torn away from them, how could one return to normality? Survival isn't simply about mending broken bones, bandaging up wounds, or adapting to your new surroundings. Survival is about learning to live again, but for many survivors of the Holocaust, learning to live was the most difficult and traumatic part of their experience.

For survivors of the Holocaust to rebuild and feel comfortable we must remember that 70 years on we are incredibly fortunate to be able to witness survivors sharing their stories with people of all ages. I am proud that so many will be speaking on a number of different campuses this week and as a member of the NUS ARAF (Anti-Racism and Anti-Fascism) Committee, I urge you to hear first-hand the stories of those who are still with us today. It is our responsibility to ensure that we not only remember the atrocities that took place but learn the crucial lessons we need and apply them to our lives today.

As we mark Holocaust Memorial Day, it is sadly in the context of rising hate in our society and on our campuses. The deep-trenched divisions that exist between communities are fuelling rises in antisemitism, islamophobia, racism, and homophobia. You only have to look at the series of antisemitic attacks that happened last weekend in North London to see that racism and fascism are challenges that our communities are being forced to face.

We must ask ourselves the very important question: how can life go on in the face of this?

Having been subjected to antisemitism, both online and in-person, I still live in fear of what might confront me when I leave my house each day simply because I'm Jewish. I know that there are so many others from marginalised communities that feel the same. But I also know that life has to go on and the only way to do that is by coming

to terms with my experience and fighting back. I won't let them win. We can't let them win. We must mend the fractures between our communities; we must rebuild, but crucially we must fight back. We must take responsibility for protecting each other, particularly the most marginalised.

We must unite, regardless of race, religion, gender, or sexuality, against all forms of hate, prejudice and discrimination because we know the path that intolerance and prejudice leads us down and it is one that we must not follow.

This Holocaust Memorial Day, think about what you can do on your campuses and communities to ensure that life can continue for those who are confronted with hate, discrimination and intolerance. We are still within living memory of the most inhumane actions of the 20th Century, but the chance to hear from those who learnt to live again is slowly becoming more and more difficult. So please, keep the memory of the Holocaust alive because we know that there are people who are trying to destroy it. We must learn about the Holocaust and all subsequent genocides, visit the sites where millions of people were brutally killed and teach future generations about the values of peace and tolerance to make sure that we never, ever forget.

I write today in memory of Elie Wiesel who sadly passed away last year. A survivor of the Holocaust, this quote can teach us that in the face of adversity, life really can go on: *"The only role I sought was that of witness. I believed that having survived by chance, I was duty-bound to give meaning to my survival, to justify each moment of my life."*