

Advice for Trade Unions holding HMD 2011 events



What is Holocaust Memorial Day?

Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) is a day for everyone. On 27 January each year, we pause to remember the millions of people who have been murdered or whose lives have been changed beyond recognition during the Holocaust, under Nazi persecution and in the subsequent genocides in Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur. We honour the survivors of those regimes of hatred and we use HMD as an opportunity to reflect on the ways in which we live our lives today. HMD offers us all the chance to create a safer, better future.

HMD has been commemorated in the UK since 2001, and in 2005 the United Nations declared 27 January as an international day for remembrance and contemporary action.

Anyone can organise an event to mark HMD, and many hundreds of events already take place. HMDT will provide you with the free resources and advice to assist you in setting up your HMD event. Any member of the HMDT team can help – call us on **0845 838 1883** or email us – enquiries@hmd.org.uk.

Why is HMD relevant?

Genocide doesn't just happen. It begins when the differences between us stop being celebrated and respected. Genocide is an act of extreme exclusion, when a State-sponsored regime of hatred is allowed to proceed unchecked. Our communities in the UK are not facing the dangers of Pol Pot's Cambodia, or that of Nazi Occupied Europe but the evils of prejudice, discrimination and exclusion are present around us today. By looking at how the building blocks of genocide are laid, you are given a choice – you can choose to stand by and do nothing or you can make the choice to speak out against anyone who bullies, stereotypes, persecutes or attacks those who are different to them. In making this choice and making the values of inclusion and respect part of everyday life and behaviour, you honour those whose lives were destroyed during the Holocaust, under Nazi persecution and in subsequent genocides.

Why should Trade Unions hold a HMD event?

The kind of hatred and discrimination that led to the Holocaust and subsequent genocides still exists in our society today. As Trade Unionists you are active members of your communities, contributing towards the fight for fairness and equality as well as challenging discrimination and exclusion in wider society. HMD provides a great opportunity to highlight and campaign for positive change in our communities and workplaces, and remind us all of our responsibility to protect the civil and human rights of everyone in our society.

Trade Unions along with many other groups were outlawed by the Nazi regime and their members were persecuted, tortured and murdered in concentration camps. HMD provides an ideal platform to remember all those who suffered at the hands of the Nazi party because they did not fit with Nazi ideals.

“Trade Unions stand for justice and equality, and have always resisted the hatred and prejudice that fuelled the Nazi Holocaust, and its successors in Bosnia and Darfur. Trade unionists died in the concentration camps, and it’s so important that we all take the time on Holocaust Memorial Day to reflect on the horrors of the past, in order to strengthen our continuing commitment to the principles on which our movement was built.”

**Brendan Barber,
General Secretary of
the TUC**

Nazi Persecution of Trade Unions

The Nazis hated anyone they believed to be ‘different’ or who they felt would resist their policies of hatred. In order to create their authoritarian order, it was important for them to bring all areas of civic life under their control. This meant that the Nazis targeted the Trade Unions in Germany particularly early in their rule.

May Day was traditionally a day of great celebration in Germany. In 1933, just 5 months after Hitler became Chancellor of Germany, the Nazis proclaimed May Day as a national holiday, calling it Day of National Labour. Trade Union leaders were surprised by this conciliatory gesture from the previously anti-trade union Nazis and co-operated with the government to observe the new holiday. Leaders were flown in to Berlin and the streets were decorated with banners and celebrations were held throughout the day. Before a huge rally, Hitler himself announced that the day represented a new era of co-operation between Trade Unions and the Nazi Party.

The celebrations of 1 May 1933 were short-lived and the Nazis had no intention of allowing the power of organised labour to threaten their dictatorship. The morning after May Day on 2 May 1933 the government ordered the dissolution of Trade Unions. The headquarters of the Unions were occupied, funds were confiscated and many of the leaders were arrested and sent to concentration camps. Goebbels wrote in his diary on the night of May Day ‘tomorrow, we will occupy the trade-union buildings. There will be little resistance’.

To date, Trade Unionists have played a huge role in the campaign to remember and learn from the lessons of the past in order to create a safer and better future. Through remembering the persecution of Trade Unionists and others in the Holocaust and more recent genocides, Trade Unions continue to fight against the evils of racism and discrimination today. Gustav Schiefer, Chairman of the Munich branch of the German Trade Union Association who was imprisoned and tortured in Dachau concentration camp remarked in his subsequent testimony against the Nazis

‘And how decent were we once more in the year 1945. Not a hair on the head of any of these swine was harmed on behalf of the Trade Unions.

We bore witness, and still bear witness today, for human dignity and justice’.

What kind of event will work for my Union?

There’s no such thing as a right or wrong HMD event. No idea is too big or too small. Whether you are a member of a Union in a workplace or working at your Union’s headquarters, you will be able to commemorate HMD 2011. Whatever the content of your event, there is only one key rule – it must reflect the needs of your audience. We also advise that you include a moment of reflection in your event. This could be during a candle-lighting or the performance of a piece of music, or simply a moment’s silence.

Each year HMD has a different theme to assist event organisers and help unify the voice of the events nationwide. The theme for this year's HMD is **Untold Stories**. There are millions of stories which will never be told because lives and whole communities were wiped out through genocide. Listening to and considering stories which have been told will help us better understand these **Untold Stories**, using the lessons learned as an inspiration for our future behaviour. Understanding why millions of stories remain untold can help us all to recognise the importance of making a stand when we see persecution or discrimination taking place in our communities today.

What's next?

First things first – you need to order our free **Campaign Pack** – this contains tips on planning your event, free posters which could be used to promote your event and our film. You'll also find a sample of our handout material, which we can provide additional copies of free of charge in quantities of 50.

After you've ordered your Campaign Pack, it's time to think about what role HMD can play in your Trade Union. Could you tie-in existing anti-discrimination training with HMD? Could you utilise the creative elements within your membership and organise a recital or social evening which celebrates diversity? Remember that HMD is a day for everyone - the most effective events are inclusive and attempt to reach out to all parts of your audience.

Think about who you would need to work with to make HMD a success for you. Do you need to collaborate with colleagues? Could you run an event with other branches or other active unions in your workplace? Can you link HMD with other equality campaigning work such as Black History Month or Refugee Week?

Your Union is a ready-made network so think about using branch newsletters or magazines to engage people with HMD and **Untold Stories**. You could also use this network to encourage colleagues to light our virtual candle, available on our website from January 2011. Once you've engaged your audience, show our film, or encourage them to read **survivor testimony**, play a **podcast** or even use one of our **book-group activities**.

Whatever you decide to do, please remember to let us know on our **Events** page. You can also view other events taking place across the country - use these as inspiration in your own planning.

Talk to us

The HMDT team are here to help. We can provide you with ideas and guidance through our advice service, as well as sending you our free resources. We're always happy to hear from you.

t – **0845 838 1883**

e – enquiries@hmd.org.uk

www.hmd.org.uk