

HMD 2012 – **Speak Up, Speak Out** – adapted version for younger readers

‘First they came for the communists, and I did not speak out...’

This is the start of a famous poem written in 1946 by Pastor Niemoller. His poem is about the dangers of not speaking up when we experience **OR** see something that is not fair – things like bullying. It tells us that if we do not speak up when we see something that is unfair or cruel, we might have the right to speak out taken away from us. The poem’s last line is: ‘Then they came for me, and there was no-one left to speak out for me’. Its lesson is that if you do not speak out for others, **there may be no-one to speak out for you** if you need it. We would want someone to help us if we needed it.

In the UK, in your school, in your street – in fact everywhere – we have something called ‘a fundamental Human Right to freedom of speech.’ That means we all have a right to speak out about what we think. We all have a voice and we have a choice about when we use it. The choices we make and the words we use can help to create a safe and fair society.

The right to speak out may seem simple but we know that sometimes it is difficult. In the past that right has been taken away, or ignored. On Holocaust Memorial Day – 27 January 2012 – we are all asked to think about our right to **Speak Up, Speak Out**; to learn the lessons of the past and to find out about things that happen today. We should learn about those things so that we can learn to speak up and to speak out.

Examples from the past

In Germany, under the leadership of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party many people had their rights taken away and that included being able to speak out or stop the bad treatment that was happening to them.

The events in Germany were called the Holocaust, and Jewish men, women and children had their right to speak up, to have their own home, to work, to own a radio, to go to school and to keep their own name, all taken away from them. The people who took away the rights of Jewish people were the Nazi Party and they had become the government. They also took away other people’s rights. Many of the people whose rights they took away they later put in prison or concentration camps, because there was **no one to speak up and stop it**.

Trade Unions were stopped so that working people had **no** rights to speak out, Gypsies were rounded up and sent to concentration camps, and those who spoke out against the government were often put in prison or murdered.

During the Genocide in Cambodia in the 1970s owning of a radio was made illegal, as it was for Jews under the Nazi regime. Radios were then an important way that people heard about the news or events as people didn’t have television or computers at home.

Being a bystander

In the past, when one group has been treated badly there have been many other people who have stood by and did not speak out to stop it.

None of us know what we would do if we were faced with a life threatening decision, but we can hope that we will do what is right. When we see something bad happening, but we turn away and ignore it, we are being a bystander.

Today, we can choose not to be a bystander. We can learn about those who have spoken up to help others in the past and use them as our role models to speak out today. We can all learn to use our voices to protect the Human Rights of all.

In the UK today we are able to **Speak Up, Speak Out** in many different ways:

- we can express and share our opinions
- we can record our views on film and audio and upload these to websites and blogs, or use sites like Facebook or Bebo
- we can write to those in power, expressing our views and we can organise or join demonstrations and protests to support what we believe in
- we can choose to speak up through the words that we use. In playgrounds, many are using the words 'Gay' and 'Jew' as a term of offence – that is not fair; people that are Gay or Jewish are normal people, not bad people. They are not words that should be used to attack people. We can all choose to challenge those who do this when we hear it
- we can urge those who have been bullied, attacked or abused in our schools, or streets to report what has happened to them
- deciding to speak up is not always an easy decision. In a minority of cases, those who have spoken up have suffered retribution (attacks). David Kato, a Gay rights activist in Uganda chose to speak out and successfully sued a Ugandan newspaper in 2010 after they printed a photograph of him and other gay men under the headline 'Hang them'. A few weeks later, David was murdered. This is an extreme case, but we must make sure we continue to speak up. David was speaking out in a country where it remains illegal to be Gay
- we are lucky we live in a country where we are able to celebrate the diversity within our communities. Here in the UK, we see people choosing to speak out and make a difference in our schools and neighbourhoods

People who have spoken up that we can learn from:

The **Rosenstraße protests** – in 1943 1,600 German Jewish men were arrested simply because they were Jewish were held in a prison in Rose Street, in Berlin. The men's German wives spoke up and demonstrated and eventually the authorities released the men.

The story of **Dr Ludwig Guttmann**, the founder of the Paralympics, was a Jewish doctor who fled Germany in 1939 to seek refuge in England. His work with disabled people led him to establish the Paralympics. He spoke up for disabled people to be given the same opportunities in the sporting arena as other athletes.

British Diplomat, **Mukesh Kapila** who was head of the UN in Sudan witnessed the start of the genocide in Darfur in April 2004 and alerted the international media, even though it cost him his career.

Holocaust survivor, **Iby Knill** was imprisoned as a political prisoner in Hungary and was later deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau. She made a promise to a dying girl to tell her story. Today, she speaks to hundreds of people each year to ensure that the crimes of the past are never again repeated.

Henry Obstfeld's rescuers, the Klerks found room in their lives and hearts for a two and a half year old Jewish child, whom they sheltered until he was five. His foster father, **Jacob**, was a dedicated Freemason, who chose to speak up against the restrictions placed on him by protecting another who was persecuted.

It is not only individuals who choose and work to **Speak Up, Speak Out**. The works of many charitable organisations give voices to the voiceless.

- **Survivors Fund** works to ensure that the memory of the 1994 genocide is not forgotten and to create a safer future for Rwandans.
- **Aegis Trust** campaigns against genocide, and has used its knowledge to bring a change to laws in the UK so that those who have committed genocide in other countries and now live here can be brought to justice.
- The **Holocaust Survivors Friendship Association**, is working to encourage young people to listen to the voices of Holocaust survivors.
- **Most Mira** are an organisation that work in the Prijedor region of Bosnia to bring together young people who are still affected by the Bosnian war of 1992-1995.
- **Mencap** run a *Get My Vote* campaign which seeks to have the voices and needs of those with learning disabilities heard and met in politics and elections.
- The **British Youth Council** works with young people in the UK ensuring that their voices and hopes are heard and acted upon.

As the world focuses on the UK in the Olympic year of 2012, we must use our voices to speak up. Discrimination and exclusion still happens in our communities, we hear the stories of terrible things that happen across the world. Now it is time for us to stop being bystanders.

It doesn't matter what our background is; we should speak up for what we believe in, for what we understand to be right. Together, we can learn the lessons of the past to create a safer, better future.

On HMD 2012 we must come together to **Speak Up, Speak Out**.