



Remembering the past,  
honouring the memory,  
shaping the future

THE FORUM FOR  
**Yom HaShoah**  
Annual Jewish Remembrance Day  
for Victims of the Holocaust

YOM HASHOAH

27<sup>TH</sup> NISSAN

**YOM HASHOAH: THE BACKGROUND**

Yom HaShoah, was established by the Knesset (Parliament) of the State of Israel in 1951, to be world Jewry's Annual Remembrance Day for Victim's of the Holocaust. This is one of only four new official days that has been added to the Jewish Calendar in more than 2000 years, the others relating specifically to Israel, namely; Yom Hazikaron, commemorating those who fell in Israel's wars; Yom Ha-Atzmaut, Israel's Independence Day; and Yom Yerushalayim, remembering the reunification of Jerusalem during the 1967 six days war.

Yom HaShoah has been commemorated in the UK by Synagogue services and events and by several Communal organisations, principally under the auspices of the (now dissolved) Polish Jewish Ex-Servicemen's Association; the 45 Aid Society of Holocaust Survivors; and the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women. With the passage of time, it now sadly lacks widespread recognition and observance by the UK Jewish community.

Since 1982, after the inauguration by the Government of the Holocaust Memorial Garden at the Dell in Hyde Park, London, the annual commemoration ceremony in London has been organised under the auspices of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, by the National Yad Vashem Charitable Trust and more recently, by its successor organisation the Yad Vashem UK Foundation.

It was through the leadership and very hard work of the Board's then President, Mr (now Lord) Greville Janner, that the National Memorial was established and London's annual commemoration ceremonies were held at the Dell for several years.

However it was subsequently decided that this would be discontinued and the major Communal London event would be held at an indoor location on the Sunday immediately following Yom HaShoah. This decision was taken primarily because of the difficulty of access to the Dell, its open air location and the mostly inclement weather conditions, which made it difficult for elderly Survivors, Refugees and Ex-Service personnel to attend and be satisfactorily accommodated.

From 2006 onwards, the Board and the Yad Vashem UK Foundation also re-introduced a short symbolic Memorial ceremony at the Dell on the day of Yom HaShoah. Representatives of all UK Synagogal and Communal organisations, Survivors, Refugees and Ex-Service personnel were invited. The programme consists of appropriate psalms, verses and prayers.

As Yom HaShoah falls 13 days after the beginning of Passover and during the school holidays, many of the Community have not returned from their holiday break by the date of the annual ceremony and major attendance numbers at the indoor event, were difficult to achieve.

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**The 'Forum' comprises the following UK Sponsoring & Participating Organisations:**

45 Aid Society / 45 Aid Second Generation Group  
Aish UK  
Anne Frank Trust  
Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen & Women  
Association of Jewish Refugees  
Beth Shalom Holocaust Centre

Board of Deputies of British Jews  
Council of Christians & Jews  
Holocaust Educational Trust  
Holocaust Memorial Day Trust  
Holocaust Survivor Centre  
Imperial War Museum

Jewish Lads' & Girls' Brigade  
Jewish Museum  
London Jewish Cultural Centre  
Maccabi GB/CST  
Pears Foundation  
Rabbi B Marcus, Central Synagogue

Second Generation Trust  
UJIA JLEC  
Union of Jewish Students  
Wiener Library  
Yad Vashem UK  
Zionist Youth Council

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6 Bloomsbury Square, London WC1A 2LP

**Tel** 020 7543 5400 **Fax** 020 7543 0010 **Email** [info@yomhashoah.org.uk](mailto:info@yomhashoah.org.uk) **Web** [www.yomhashoah.org.uk](http://www.yomhashoah.org.uk)

Working with the Board of Deputies of British Jews

Despite recent innovations which have substantially increased attendance and involved participation of youth organisations, both the Board and the Survivor, Refugee and Ex-Service organisations have become extremely concerned as to how the commemoration would be observed in future years, when those who experienced or lived through the tragedy would no longer be here.

The recent advent of Jan 27th, as Holocaust Memorial Day and the major annual Government sponsored educational and advertising campaigns associated with it, has brought greater attention to the horrors and dangers of worldwide Holocausts and Genocides.

But it has co-incidentally, also had the negative effect of detracting attention from the Jewish Community's own commemoration of the Nazi Holocaust, which systematically and so callously murdered over six million Jews alone, including one and a half million children.

## THE FORUM: PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

In 2007, Yad Vashem UK Foundation convened a meeting of the 25 UK organisations involved in the fields of Holocaust Education; Remembrance and Awareness activities; and Survivor, Refugee and Ex-Service personnel welfare.

In 2009 this "Forum" group, which had previously agreed to closer mutual collaboration and communication, decided on its first specific joint initiative. This was to organise a major awareness campaign within the UK Jewish Community of Yom HaShoah, under the collective banner of; "The Forum for Yom HaShoah"

It would attempt to promote its more extensive recognition and observance amongst the adult and more especially the younger age groups and thereby hopefully ensure its continuation in perpetuity.

## THE FORUM: THE STRATEGY

A planned 5 year campaign, starting in 2010, coincides with the dates of Yom HaShoah, for the first time since its inception, falling on a Sunday in four of those years, 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2014, making its wider observance that much more attainable.

The Forum agreed that no major indoor event would be held in London in these years, but in the intermediate year 2012, a major all day indoor event would be held, on the Sunday following Yom HaShoah.

In addition to a commemoration ceremony, this would include Holocaust education seminars, talks, films, music and art all related to the Holocaust, which would be of interest to all the age- ranges within the Community.

It would also for the first time, give Survivors, Refugees, Ex-Service personnel and other attendees, the opportunity of meeting and mixing during the lunchtime break.

The concept is to take an awareness and the observance of Yom HaShoah "out" to the Community, by a proliferation of events.

Each and every Synagogue in the UK will be asked to hold a Yom HaShoah memorial service, either on the day itself or on the preceding Shabbat.

This initiative has received the endorsement of the Chief Rabbi and the United Synagogue and the religious and lay leaders of the other major Synagogal congregations; the Spanish and Portuguese; Reform; Federation; Liberal and Masorti.

It has been agreed that this Shabbat immediately preceding the day of Yom HaShoah, will be dedicated as "Yom HaShoah Shabbat" and observed as such in all Synagogues.

Rabbis will be encouraged to deliver a special sermon to mark the occasion; to include Memorial prayers in the services; Synagogues will be asked to notify their members of the special observance; and Yom HaShoah material will be available on request, for inclusion in Synagogue magazines; newsletters and Shabbat publications.

Educational programmes, directed specifically to the meaning and importance of the Yom HaShoah commemoration, will be distributed to all Jewish schools, youth clubs and organisations and Chederim. Each would be encouraged to organise their own form of remembrance event.

In addition, all members of the Forum group, will also publicise Yom HaShoah to their membership. Those with membership activities, will initiate specific programmes for their members as well as the Community at large, either on Yom HaShoah itself or on the days immediately preceding or following the anniversary.

The symbolic "Dell" Memorial ceremony will be continued in a slightly extended format, with an invitation also being extended to the whole London Jewish community. Regional Communities will be encouraged either to continue with arrangements previously held or to initiate ceremonies/events.

Memorials to the Holocaust in cemeteries, will be attended by volunteers, with visitors being made aware of the Memorial Day.

Extensive publicity will be given to the campaign in the Jewish press, with a special "Directory" of events being held throughout the country.

The Forum website will include services/events information, memorial programmes and articles. The electronic media will be the main outlet for Communal information, with organisations being encouraged to publicise the commemoration as extensively as possible, via whatever electronic means they communicate with their membership and database contacts.

The Survivors and Refugees in particular, wish to be as actively involved as possible. They are recognised by all organisations involved in the field of Holocaust education, as being the most effective method of communication.

They are willing to attend synagogues, speak at events and write of their experiences, whilst still here to do so.

## **OUR RESPONSIBILITY**

It is our responsibility to ensure that the message of, "Remembering the Past, Honouring the Memory and Shaping the Future" is carried forward from present to future generations.

Only by this means can we ensure that a unique tragedy of this magnitude that befell our people just because they were Jews, is never allowed to happen again, either to our people or any other race or religion.

As we re-tell the story of the Exodus each year on Passover, so we should also re-tell the story of the tragedy of the Holocaust and the subsequent joy of the re-birth of the State of Israel.

It is planned to publish a "Companion" to be read with the Haggadah, so that these two further momentous events in the history of the Jewish people, can also be recalled by every Jewish family as they gather each year around the Seder table.

The lesson of Yom HaShoah is that a tragedy of such magnitude starts from very small beginnings. It might be as simple as with bullying, then leading on to discrimination, bigotry, racism and xenophobia.

It only takes ONE person to stand up against these sinister actions, to encourage others to follow that example.

Unless each and every person understands that and is willing if necessary to be that ONE person who stands up first, the lessons of history will not have been learned and past mistakes could be repeated, with equally tragic consequences.

In an era of increasing denial of the Holocaust, rising right-wing extremism, unsettling social and religious divisions, and economic hardship and uncertainty, let us ensure that the UK Jewish Community renews its resolve never to forget this recent tragic experience and the need to educate its future generations about the dangers they could face in the future.