

# *Message from*

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In November 2008 the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Chief Rabbi organised a visit to Auschwitz by British faith leaders. All the nine faiths present in Britain today were represented.

We didn't go on our own but with a large group of 6th formers. The Holocaust Education Trust charters planes- 14 a year- and flies parties of 6th formers and teachers to Krakow and then by coach to the town of Oswiecim and on to Auschwitz/ Birkenau. They take two 6th formers and a teacher per school plus, in some cases, the local Member of Parliament.

I sat on the floor of the departure lounge of Krakow airport late that night, talking to a group and knew instantly that the programme was worthwhile. They were deeply moved by the experience. The reality of the Shoah had been brought home to them in a way that is only possible if you go to Poland.

A few weeks later, the Presidents of the Council of Christians and Jews devoted much of their annual meeting to engage with thirty or so of the 200 who had gone with them. The students found it hard to fully articulate what they had seen and felt – the scale, the mechanisation, the dehumanisation, the sadism, the incomprehensible pointlessness, the wickedness. But it had changed their understanding of evil and of the need to resist, most particularly in the small 'banalities' of their own lives.

I think that most of the faith leaders were similarly affected and moved. This was an important and powerful initiative.

But one thing worried me and that had to do with me. Walking along the railway line into Birkenau, I was overwhelmed by the feelings of incomprehension, fury and despair that I had previously felt in that terrible place.

No-one will ever fully comprehend how supposedly civilised human beings could have done this to our people. I want all men and women to feel fury with anyone who could perpetrate such acts on any human being and vow to play their part in ensuring 'never again'. But the despair is troubling.

Rabbi Hugo Gryn, may the memory of that righteous man always be a blessing, told the story of how his father made a Chanukkah lamp in the camp and used some of his precious margarine ration for the oil. Hugo objected to this waste but his father replied: You have seen how we can live for three weeks without food, three days without water, but you cannot live for three minutes without hope.

Maintaining the memory of the Shoah is a sacred task. How do we ensure that the memory kindles hope rather than extinguishes it in despair?