



Statement by the Archbishop of Canterbury on Holocaust Memorial Day 2006

31.01.2006

The importance of Holocaust Memorial Day is in its role in continually bringing to mind the unique significance for Europe in general and for Christians in particular, of the Holocaust.

It is essential for each generation to be able to enter into the terrible events of the Holocaust at the level of knowledge and of feeling and I welcome the Government's grant to the Holocaust Educational Trust to enable more schools to make a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau. While it is true that human history has been stained by other genocides, including those of our own generation, the events of the Nazi era stand alone in their nature and causes.

The development of a range of inter religious dialogues in recent years has been welcome and fruitful, and further new initiatives such as the Christian Muslim Forum and the work towards a full Hindu Christian dialogue carry real promise. Nevertheless from a Christian perspective the dialogue between Christians and Jews is not only historically the most senior, but is also theologically distinct. The Council of Christians and Jews, founded in the midst of the terrible events in Europe of 1942, has done an enormous amount to help many to reconsider their theological understandings and to develop deep personal friendships. The many celebrations of the 40th anniversary of Nostra Aetate (the declaration on Christian-Jewish relations by the second Vatican Council) last year highlighted the journey that many Christians and Jews have made together.

2006 is a year of particular significance as it is the 350th anniversary of the Resettlement of the Jewish community in this country. As a nation we should celebrate this anniversary, marking as it does, not only an attempt to right some of the terrible wrongs earlier inflicted on Jewish people, but also as an opportunity to celebrate the quite remarkable contributions of Jewish people to every aspect of the life of this country. Without the Resettlement, it is hard to imagine what our history, culture, politics and economy would be like today. Without doubt we would have been greatly the poorer in every respect.

It is all the more appalling that despite these positive developments, there is an acknowledged and frightening rise in anti Semitic publications, websites and physical incidents in this country and in many others. The desecration of Jewish cemeteries in Manchester and London, a range of hate incidents and the need for security at all synagogues - these are matters that we cannot ignore. Is it not a matter of the gravest concern that a religious community in this country must, on the advice

of the police, put in place a range of security measures for its worship, the education of its children and its social activities? For what other religious community is this systematically the case? This is serious enough; but elsewhere in the world, there are inflammatory, bigoted and irresponsible statements made even by some in prominent public positions.

I welcome the All-Party Parliamentary Enquiry into rising levels of anti-Semitism in this country and I hope that all religious communities will make clear to it their abhorrence of anti-Semitism and the measures they are taking to ensure that it finds not the smallest foothold in our churches, mosques, gurdwaras or temples.

In this year of the anniversary of the Resettlement, one important mark of the progress we have made since 1656 will not only be that we can celebrate what Jewish people and the Jewish faith have so abundantly given to our society, but more profoundly that we renew our commitment to the struggle against anti-Semitism and its causes.

Anglican Communion News Service
