

13 May 2025

Members of the House of Lords
House of Lords
London, UK SW1A 0AA

Dear Lords and Baronesses,

I write to you in my capacities as the CEO and Finci-Viterbi Chair of the USC Shoah Foundation, UNESCO Chair on Antisemitism and Holocaust Research, and as Academic Advisor to the 35-nation International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance.

The purpose of my letter is simple: the successful development and opening of a UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in Victoria Tower Gardens is a critical and politically important step – one that can help secure the future of Holocaust remembrance and education on a global level.

At the time of this letter, we are now eight decades since the end of the Holocaust and will soon face a world without living witnesses to or survivors of the Shoah. Indeed, today, there are likely fewer than 220,000 Holocaust survivors alive across the world (and most of these were young children in 1945). Absent the unique power of living witnesses and survivors and beset by an environment punctuated by disinformation and propaganda by states that seek to revive the illiberal politics of the past, the fate of our field and this subject remain on shaky ground. When one considers the influence of the Holocaust on helping shape a great many postwar institutions – from international human rights frameworks to the UN, NATO, and other key institutions – the implications of forgetting this shared history may be quite disastrous.

Establishing the UK Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre immediately next to the Palace of Westminster is a statement to the world that this history matters because it can teach to recognize the signs of democratic decline, about what happens when societies turn a blind eye to hatred, of the personal histories of those who were murdered and those few who survived, and of our shared engagement with a subject that affected every country in Europe, North Africans, and many of the nations of the Americas.

These lessons must be passed to all audiences so they can learn from the past, recognize who they are in the present, and aspire to become better for the future. There are few places from which one can teach these lessons in ways that reach global audiences. Paradoxically, those locations include two of the most-visited capital cities in the world, notably, London and Washington, DC. In the American case, the most-visited Holocaust institution in the world is in Washington, DC. There, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum has had an average of greater than 1.5 million onsite visitors each year, while a further 34 million people utilize the Museum's website on an annual basis. Such extraordinary numbers of visitors are possible thanks to its location, within proximity of the White House and the Washington Monument.

To be sure, with the rise of antisemitism there is a need to consider security concerns. The Washington Museum is located within an area that is not free of possible threats. And yet, those threats have been minimized in large part thanks to the museum's location within a very secure sector of the US capital city. The same seems to be true (if not more so) with the proposed location of the UK Memorial Centre. Indeed,

a space next to the House of Parliament would allow the site to benefit by being in one of the most secure areas of London.

Ensuring that US institutions have strong UK counterparts is certainly important. More than that, though, it is essential that Europe have a strong Holocaust-focused institution. A strong partner to Europe in the UK (a country that has produced and is home to many of the world's most respected scholars of the Holocaust) will ensure that foreign government Holocaust institutions can thrive and work in partnership with one another. These institutions include (but are not limited to) Amsterdam's Nationaal Holocaust Museum, Berlin's Stiftung Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas, Paris's Mémorial de la Shoah, Rome's Fondazione Museo della Shoah, Warsaw's POLIN Museum, as well as other important international institutions including Jerusalem's Yad Vashem, and in progress institutions in Belgrade, Bucharest, Kyiv and Stockholm.

A successful Holocaust institution must assess and educate about the ways that this history affected the international sphere, as well as the home front. No country, not even those on the side of the Allies, walked away clean from the Holocaust. In the US, we have had to more seriously assess our failure to open immigration rolls for Jews before the start of the Second World War and the ways that certain industrialists enabled certain actions of the Nazi State. In the case of the United Kingdom, too little remains known about the crimes committed in the Channel Islands or the less noble aspects of the Kindertransport rescue operation. It is my understanding that the planned presentation of the UK Centre will address these aspects and more, while also keeping the focus firmly on this history and its relevance. This is a positive sign that the institution will engender a positive dialogue across British society and beyond; a recipe for success, if you will.

Finally, if I may, across the Atlantic World, we are witnessing the rise of a politics inimical to sustaining a healthy and honest memory of the Holocaust. Establishing a Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre in London, next to the Palace of Westminster, sends a clear and powerful message to the world: this history matters because it teaches us about what the world was, what it means today, and how we might address the challenges of the future. Direct proximity to one of the most inviolable Houses of Democracy cannot be taken lightly. It would be a beacon to the world, and the world will pay attention.

I am happy to answer any further questions and place both myself and my institution at your disposal. If we can be of any support, we are happy to do so.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Robert J. Williams', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Robert J. Williams, Ph.D.
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UNESCO Chair on Antisemitism and Holocaust Research
Advisor to the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance