

## **Bailiff's speech for Holocaust Memorial Day**

**27<sup>th</sup> January 2020**

Your Excellency, Deputy Chief Minister, ladies and gentlemen,

1. This is the first time that I have had the solemn privilege of speaking at Holocaust Memorial Day and I am conscious that I do so on a significant occasion. As you all know, it is 75 years ago today that the largest Nazi Concentration Camp - Auschwitz-Birkenau – was liberated by the Russian Army and the appalling truth of Hitler's genocide became known.
2. In the years that have passed, the 27<sup>th</sup> January has been chosen to mark Holocaust Memorial Day – to remember the six million Jewish men, women and children who were murdered during the Second World War alongside the millions of others killed under Nazi persecutions and in subsequent genocides.
3. It is not surprising that this date was chosen as that camp, and what was found, there reveals man's capacity for evil as perhaps no other place and event could.
4. The Nazis did not confine their murderous activities to the Jews, there were others whom they also deemed 'different' and less than human.

5. These people were labelled '*untermenschen*' –and as well as Jews, included homosexuals, the disabled, and those from Slavic countries. Although the shoah – the Nazi killing of the Jews – was an unprecedented attack against a religion and a people and must be remembered in itself, we remember too the other victims of genocide, millions of lives lost and changed in modern-day, mass-killings.
6. How, then, do we mark such things? How do we try to understand the unthinkable? To turn our minds to that darkest part of our human nature and own it for ourselves so that it cannot happen again?
7. Well one of the ways, perhaps, is to understand it by knowing our stories, the stories of those who experienced it and were affected by it.
8. Here, in Jersey, as we all here know, 21 islanders were deported to Germany for offences against the occupying forces. It was there that they died or were killed in Nazi prisons and concentration camps.
9. Many of their offences were trivial in today's terms, and yet others were notable by standing up for what was right against the forces occupying their home.

10. I confess that through my childhood and my early adult life I was ignorant of the stories of the islanders who were sent from their island in that way never to return.
11. I was aware of the appalling story of the Holocaust insofar as it related to the Jewish people, my parents had a book that told that story, but I did not really become aware of the Jersey stories until I had qualified as an advocate and had joined the law firm Ogier & Le Cornu. There, in the reception area, was a faded picture of the founder of the firm, **Leonce L'Hermitte Ogier**, one of the 21, with a brief paragraph telling the story of his trial for espionage related charges, his subsequent acquittal, return to Jersey and then subsequent deportation and death in Germany. He was not Jewish, nor was he otherwise *untermenschen*, but he was a victim of the same regime that produced the atrocities that we remember here today.
12. Did I pay much attention at the time? Possibly not enough, and that is why it is so important to keep repeating those stories. It is too easy to make the Nazi Holocaust, or any genocide, a matter of numbers and statistics and forget that these events are about people, families, about terror and about the dehumanisation of people, our brothers and sisters.
13. I think, therefore, it can be helpful to concentrate on a particular person in order to bring home what occurred. I cannot in the time

available speak about each and all of the 21 but I can mention a few:

14. **Canon Clifford Cohu**, the Rector of St Saviour's Church openly defied and challenged the German occupiers. He would broadcast news about the Allied war effort while riding his bike through the town.
15. Wireless sets were of course banned during the Occupation and Islanders who kept sets hidden away risked imprisonment.
16. Canon Cohu was part of a group in St Saviour who were tried in April 1943. He was sentenced to 18 months imprisonment for '*disseminating anti-German news*'. He died on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1944 in Zöschen, a camp run by the SS, near Naumberg in Germany.
17. **St Ouen shopkeeper, Louisa Gould's** '*crime*' was protecting an escaped Russian slave worker, Féodor 'Bill' Burriy. Betrayed by neighbours to the German occupiers, she was arrested on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1944 after her home was searched.
18. Burriy had been safely moved to another hideaway but a wireless set, a camera and gift labels which identified her as the giver and the Russian as the recipient, were found. At her trial the following month, she was sentenced to 2 years imprisonment and deported. She died in the gas chambers of Ravensbrück

concentration camp in February 1945. I am reminded of her plaque, the unveiling of which was attended by Burriy who survived thanks to her aid. Louisa Gould did not recognise this Russian Slave worker as inferior....he was, in her words, “*another mother’s son*”.

19. **June Sinclair** was a half-Jewish orphan from London. Little was known about her, except that she worked in one of the hotels that were requisitioned by German occupiers. It is thought she was sent into the camp system after retaliating by slapping a German soldier’s face after he molested her at work. She is thought to have been about 20 years old when she too perished in Ravensbrück concentration camp on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1943.

20. These are just a few words about each of these people and are easily lost in the noise that surrounds us. But if we read those stories slowly, use the gift of imagination to place ourselves in the shoes of those people and the others, the courage displayed by some, the experience of capture, interrogation, fear, of being sent away from all you know, of being ill and dying in pain far from home and loved ones, and in one case at least the journey to the unspeakable horror of the gas chamber, we can perhaps begin to understand the real purpose of today.

21. This day gives us an opportunity to recall what occurred and reflect, asking what lessons we have learned, and how can we prevent the recurrence of anything like this happening again?
22. Sadly the reality is that, since 1945, history has shown that humanity has not learned the lessons we needed to learn.
23. But amongst the stories of devastation, as these three of many stories show, are also stories of hope – people who stood up to be counted, who risked their lives to save others’ lives. Even the lives of those they did not know. Those who fought and who still fight against the forces of racism, intolerance, and tyranny.
24. A former Bailiff, Sir Philip Bailhache, speaking on this day in 2009 said this:
- “We cannot teach people to be heroes. But we can teach children to understand how the bullying or hatred or disdain of minorities, and discrimination against people who are different in some way are the first steps on the road to Auschwitz..... If we can teach young people to challenge any racist talk or attitudes, and to show respect for others, irrespective of race, gender orientation or religion, we will have learned the lesson of Auschwitz.”*
25. I do not apologise for adopting and echoing those words and those sentiments.

26. This year also marks 75 years since Jersey was freed from the occupying forces, following the Second World War, and it seems to me that the stories of the Liberation are inextricably linked to the stories of the 21. Freedom, peace and inclusivity are the key themes of Liberation Day and the stories of the 21, and indeed of all of the victims of holocaust, which are about the absence of those things, must be heard at the same time as the joyful stories that will be told on that day. They are two sides of the same coin.

27. Aptly, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust's theme for today is '*Stand Together*'. Well, if we continue to listen out with vigilance for the insidious messages of intolerance and tyranny and call it out and resist it where we hear it; if we make it a positive aim in this place to create a kinder and more tolerant society; if we simply **stand together** as fellow human beings, and not as black or white, heterosexual or homosexual, or one religion versus another.....then surely we will have heard and honoured the stories of our 21, the broader message of holocaust and of Liberation.

Thank you.