

# Press release: More faith and belief groups to join the National Service of Remembrance

Seven more faith and belief groups are to be permanently represented during the National Remembrance Service at the Cenotaph from this year Faith Minister Lord Bourne announced today (17 October 2018).

Jains, Zoroastrians and Copts are among those faiths and beliefs that will now take part in this country's greatest service to remember and honour the heroes of our past – making the National Service of Remembrance more reflective of modern Britain.

The addition of several smaller faith communities like Mormons, Baha'ís and Spiritualists, will reflect the significant but little-known contribution made by minority ethnic communities to Britain's war efforts.

It also sends a strong signal throughout Britain and the world that this country values the contribution of its diverse communities.

Minister for Faith Lord Bourne said:

One hundred years ago, men and women of all faiths and beliefs made huge sacrifices for our freedom in the First World War.

It's absolutely right as a modern, multi-faith society that we step up our efforts to honour those people of other faiths for their contribution. It's because of their bravery and selflessness that we are afforded the privileges and luxuries we enjoy today. Their sacrifices should be honoured through the ages.

Currently, the list of 15 faiths represented at the service does not reflect the diversity of those who gave their lives so that others could live in peace. Those faiths and beliefs selected have a long and proud link to Britain's Armed Forces. Their inclusion will ensure that the National Remembrance Service is now truly reflective of the diverse faiths and beliefs who help to make Britain the great country we are today.

His Eminence Archbishop Angaelos, Coptic Orthodox Archbishop of London said:

While Christianity focuses on peace and reconciliation, war has been a regrettable part of the reality of our world, as a result of which many have paid the ultimate price to keep us safe. It is for this reason that we honour their memory and pray for their families and colleagues who still mourn their loss, while also praying for those who follow their selfless example today.

While we remember our fallen heroes who have paid the ultimate price to keep us safe, we give thanks that this year's Centenary anniversary, marking the end of the First World War, is a reassuring reminder that even the ugliness and destruction of war has an end.

Malcolm M Deboo, President of Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe said:

For a tiny faith community, the Zoroastrians have punched well above their weight and contributed immensely to Britain in both World Wars.

At the outbreak of the First World War, thousands volunteered from Britain and India to serve as soldiers and doctors and many were decorated for their bravery and sacrifice. Sadly, many also lost their lives and a Zoroastrian War Memorial was erected in their memory in South Bombay in 1926 where they are remembered annually.

The Zoroastrian Trust Funds of Europe is extremely delighted to be invited to the National Remembrance Ceremony for Armistice 100 and is honoured to be a part of remembering those that sacrificed so much 100 years ago.

Following an open nomination process, run by Faiths Forum for London on MHCLG's behalf, the following list of faiths and beliefs have been selected to be included in the annual National Remembrance Service both for this and future years:

### **The Zoroastrians**

The contribution of the Zoroastrian community to Britain's war effort greatly exceeds their small size. There have been notable Zoroastrian servicemen in both World Wars and the Falklands conflict, including Col Phirozshah Byramji Bharucha of the 14th Ferozepore Sikhs who was the first Indian to be awarded the Distinguished Service Order. The loss of the lives of Zoroastrian servicemen in World War one also came at great cost to the faith, which relies on the male line to continue the faith, from which it never fully recovered.

### **The Coptic Christians**

The Coptic Christians are the most persecuted Christian community in the world and if any community is a symbol of extending the hand of peace despite facing regular violent attacks, it is this one. The Coptic Christians have also played their part in supporting Britain in the two World Wars, especially in the Egyptian campaigns.

### **The Jains**

Although the Jain faith focuses on non-violence, the Jain community has a

long history of serving in the military, including Britain's armed forces. For Jains, it is their duty to stand up to tyranny and violence to bring peace. Jains have been an active force in both World Wars.

### **The Baha'ís**

The Baha'í faith owes its very existence to the Indian cavalrymen, fighting for Britain, who rescued the Baha'í spiritual leader from Ottoman captivity in September 1918, in the last major cavalry campaign in military history. Without this action, the fledgling Bahá'í faith may not have survived. To that end, the Baha'ís honour the sacrifices made for their faith by these servicemen both through remembrance and through military service in Britain and abroad.

### **The Humanists**

A significant number of people serving in Britain's military do not ascribe to a particular faith, but many of these will associate with Humanist beliefs. It is important that in our quest to create a National Remembrance Service which is reflective of modern Britain, that major belief systems are recognised as well as faiths, including the Humanists.

### **The Spiritualists**

The number of Spiritualists grew dramatically over the course of the First World War. In 1914, there were 145 societies affiliated to the Spiritualists National Union. By the end of the War, it had more than doubled to 309. Spiritualism provided an important source of faith and comfort for many soldiers dealing with the effects of war.

### **The Mormons**

The First World War was hugely influential on the Mormon faith and its followers. For many, it was an opportunity to change the way that others viewed the Church and the valiant actions of these men often caused other soldiers to rethink the way they felt about the Saints. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have a long history and tradition of military service and continue to support the military.

### **Case study: Abdul Baha'**

Immediately prior to the outbreak of the First World War, Abdul Baha', son of the Founder-Prophet of the Baha'i faith and steward of the nascent Baha'i community, was nearly 70 and being held as a prisoner of conscience in Haifa, Israel – the spiritual centre of the Baha'i faith. With his life under threat from the Ottoman authorities, the War Office hatched a plan to rescue him following lobbying from the British Baha'i community.

In September of 1918, men of the Jodhpur Lancers and the Mysore Lancers supported by the Sherwood Forester Yeomanry, rode to Haifa to secure the life of the figure known to Baha'ís as "the Centre of the Covenant".

In dramatic scenes, troops of the Jodhpur Lancers took Turkish forces by

surprise, launching an audacious charge up the slopes of Mount Carmel. Despite early setbacks, the Indian cavalry charged in the face of artillery and heavy machine-gun fire, capturing two machine gun positions, 1,350 prisoners and opening the route to Haifa.

A detachment of Mysore Lancers rode immediately to secure the house of Abdul Baha and Baha'i shrines were protected from destruction – today they remain the primary site of pilgrimage for the Baha'i community across the world.

Overseeing the operation, General Allenby sent a cable to London: "Notify the world that Abdul Baha is safe." The legacy of the courage and sacrifice witnessed that day has been the flowering of a worldwide Baha'i community, including perhaps close to 2 million Baha'is in India today.

The Cenotaph in Whitehall, London has played host to the Remembrance Service for the past nine decades. On the Sunday nearest to 11 November at 11am each year, a Remembrance Service is held at the Cenotaph to commemorate British and Commonwealth servicemen and women who died in the two World Wars and later conflicts.

The monarch, religious leaders, politicians, representatives of state and the armed and auxiliary forces, gather to pay respect to those who gave their lives defending others. The service has changed little since it was first introduced in 1921, hymns are sung, prayers are said and a two-minute silence is observed. Official wreaths are laid on the steps of The Cenotaph. The ceremony ends with a march past of war veterans as a gesture of respect for their fallen comrades.

## **Faiths currently invited to the National Remembrance Service**

At present, 15 faith and belief denominations are represented at the Remembrance Service. These are:

- The Roman Catholic Church
- Churches in Communities International representing Free Churches
- Methodist Conference
- United Reform Church
- Baptist Union
- Unitarian and Free Christian Churches
- Salvation Army
- Chief Rabbi
- Reform Judaism
- Muslim Representative
- Hindu Representative
- Buddhist Representative
- Director of the Sikh Network UK
- Greek Orthodox Church Representative
- Church of Scotland