

Speech: Remembering Srebrenica Memorial Event

Thank you, Jon [Professor Jon Silverman], and good evening everyone.

It's a great honour to be here tonight to mark this important milestone – 23 years since the Srebrenica genocide.

It's still hard to believe what happened there.

That scenes we thought would never be repeated after the World Wars unfolded on our doorstep and in our modern age.

But as this year's theme – [Acts of Courage](#) – rightly highlights, even in the darkest times, there is always light and hope.

I know my ministerial colleague Lord Bourne was honoured to have helped launch this at the House of Lords earlier this year.

It's a theme that reminds us that real courage isn't about epic feats or superhuman qualities or skills.

It's about the decisions that ordinary people make, every day, under sometimes severe pressure, to put others first.

During the war in Bosnia, these decisions saw Jewish families choosing to protect their Muslim neighbours.

They saw teachers choosing to refuse to exclude pupils on the basis of their faith.

People choosing to risk their lives to tell the world what was happening.

And, even now – as seen through the work of Mothers of Srebrenica – people choosing to continue to fight for justice for their loved ones.

And that's the point – even in the most desperate of circumstances, even when we feel there's no choice, there's always a choice.

And the people in Bosnia, who chose hope over hate – even when their neighbours succumbed to an appalling genocidal ideology – are truly remarkable.

And I applaud them.

Ordinary people showing the most extraordinary courage – whose experiences challenge us to consider not just why people hate and perpetrate evil, but also how communities can resist this, survive and remain hopeful.

As [Remembering Srebrenica](#) has so rightly said, these questions are critical for preventing future genocides and paving the way for peace and

reconciliation.

A big part of this work also, of course, involves survivors speaking out; continuing to tell their stories, demanding the truth about what happened, testifying to ensure that justice is done.

As underlined by last year's focus on the horrific atrocities committed against women and girls, this is another, very powerful example of the incredible courage and resilience shown by those who have suffered unspeakable trauma.

I know that we will be hearing from the survivors who are with us today and I want to pay tribute to them – for everything they've gone through and for sharing their stories with us.

Even now there are still those who deny that the genocide happened and glorify the perpetrators.

Which is why it is vital that we continue to support survivors to stand up and be heard.

To ensure that we never forget what happened and learn from it.

I know that this mission is at the heart of Remembering Srebrenica's work.

The UK government is very proud to celebrate all that you have achieved over 5 years.

- over 5,300 memorial activities organised, bringing together 175,000 from all backgrounds
- 75,000 young people benefiting from your educational programmes to ensure that future generations learn from the past
- the creation of over 1,000 Community champions, who have done so much to fulfill their pledge to commemorate Srebrenica and other genocides and to challenge bigotry in their own areas today

I understand that 2017 was one of your most successful years yet and I am sure that you will build on this – to not only remember the victims of Srebrenica, but to inspire us, through their courage and resolve, to build strong, vibrant, well-integrated communities.

Sadly – as we saw during last year's terror attacks in London Bridge, Manchester and Finsbury Park – there are still those who want to divide us and spread fear and hatred.

That they did not succeed was, again, down to the courage and resolve of survivors and ordinary people who, regardless of their differences, came together so magnificently.

People like Imam [Mohammed] Mahmoud, whose courage and calm, prevented further tragedy at Finsbury Park.

I had the privilege of meeting him recently and it was a pleasure to be able to thank him personally and to express my support for his efforts to champion our free, open and tolerant society.

We all need to get behind this vital endeavor.

We in government are playing our part by, for example, strengthening our approach to tackling hate crime. We will publish our plans to do this later this summer.

We're also supporting communities to thrive – to ensure that people of all backgrounds can take advantage of the opportunities that our country offers – through our bold new [Integrated Communities Strategy green paper](#).

Work is underway to trial a new localised approach to tackling integration challenges in 5 areas.

And we will also be hosting a [Communities Conference](#) in September; to inspire policymakers and showcase the incredible impact that cohesive communities can have.

From my previous roles, I know just how important this work is to creating a strong sense of belonging and identity and places that people from every walk of life are proud to call home.

It's this sense of belonging and pride that, I believe, is our guiding light in the darkest of times.

It only remains for me to once again thank Remembering Srebrenica for your very valuable work.

To honour the victims of Srebrenica.

To ensure we learn from their experiences.

To remind us that we always have a choice to stand up and do the right thing – and to inspire us with the courage we need to do it.