

Press release: PM commits to government-wide drive to tackle loneliness

Today (Wednesday 17 January) the Prime Minister will set out how government is tackling loneliness and combating social isolation.

She will announce that the government is accepting a series of recommendations from the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness.

The Prime Minister will host a reception at Downing Street to celebrate Jo Cox's legacy, and the important work of her family, Foundation and the Commission in highlighting how many people are experiencing loneliness.

Research shows:

- more than 9 million people always or often feel lonely
- around 200,000 older people have not had a conversation with a friend or relative in more than a month
- up to 85% of young disabled adults – 18-34 year olds – feel lonely

Ahead of the reception, the Prime Minister paid tribute to Jo Cox, her family and to those working for the Foundation and Commission for highlighting the issue.

The Prime Minister said:

For far too many people, loneliness is the sad reality of modern life.

I want to confront this challenge for our society and for all of us to take action to address the loneliness endured by the elderly, by carers, by those who have lost loved ones – people who have no one to talk to or share their thoughts and experiences with.

Jo Cox recognised the scale of loneliness across the country and dedicated herself to doing all she could to help those affected.

So I am pleased that government can build on her legacy with a ministerial lead for loneliness who will work with the Commission, businesses and charities to shine a light on the issue and pull together all strands of government to create the first ever strategy.

We should all do everything we can to see that, in Jo's memory, we bring an end to the acceptance of loneliness for good.

The Prime Minister has today implemented the first of the Jo Cox Commission's recommendations – appointing a ministerial lead on loneliness. The Minister for Sport and Civil Society Tracey Crouch will lead a cross-government group which will take responsibility for driving action on loneliness across all parts of government and keeping it firmly on the agenda.

In addition, work has also begun on:

- developing a cross-government strategy on loneliness in England to be published later this year. This will bring together government, local government, public services, the voluntary and community sector and businesses to identify opportunities to tackle loneliness, and build more integrated and resilient communities
- developing the evidence-base around the impact of different initiatives in tackling loneliness, across all ages and within all communities, led by the government's What Works centres
- establishing appropriate indicators of loneliness across all ages with the Office for National Statistics so these figures can be included in major research studies
- a dedicated fund which will see government working with charitable trusts, foundations, and others to:
 - stimulate innovative solutions to loneliness across all ages, backgrounds and communities
 - provide seed funding for communities to come together to develop activities which enable people to connect
 - scale-up and spread existing work offering practical and emotional support to help lonely individuals reconnect with their communities

A number of government initiatives are already in place to help reduce loneliness, including improved mental health support, and the pocket parks programme which has transformed unused spaces into new green areas, giving lonely people the chance to join volunteering groups and interact with neighbours.

New ministerial lead for loneliness, Minister for Sport and Civil Society Tracey Crouch said:

I am privileged to be taking forward the remarkable work done by Jo Cox, the Foundation and the Commission. I am sure that with the support of volunteers, campaigners, businesses and my fellow MPs from all sides of the House, we can make significant progress in defeating loneliness.

This is an issue that Jo cared passionately about and we will honour her memory by tackling it, helping the millions of people across the UK who suffer from loneliness.

Loneliness can be triggered by a life event, such as a bereavement or becoming a parent, with certain groups, such as young people and carers, particularly at risk.

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, chaired by Rachel Reeves MP and Seema Kennedy MP, has spent the last year considering what the government and others can do to help. They have been working with 13 charities including Age UK and Action for Children to develop ideas for change.

Rachel Reeves MP and Seema Kennedy MP, co-Chairs of the Commission said:

We are really pleased to see that the government is taking the issue of loneliness very seriously with its prompt response to our report. Jo Cox said that “young or old, loneliness doesn’t discriminate.

Throughout 2017 we have heard from new parents, children, disabled people, carers, refugees and older people about their experience of loneliness.

We very much welcome that government has accepted the Commission’s recommendations including the appointment of a new ministerial lead who will have the responsibility for creating a national strategy to tackle loneliness. We look forward to working with Minister Tracey Crouch, businesses, community groups and the public to create a world less lonely.

Mark Robinson, Chief Officer of Age UK Barnet said:

Loneliness can kill. It’s proven to be worse for health than smoking 15 cigarettes a day, but it can be overcome and needn’t be a factor in older people’s lives.

Age UK provide a wide variety of services and we welcome the work that the government is doing to support lonely people in communities throughout the country.

Phil Burton, a former Royal Artillery Lance Bombardier, will attend the reception to receive a Point of Light Award from the Prime Minister for his work to tackle loneliness. He founded the Veterans’ Café in Leyland which brings former members of the armed forces together, to talk, share experiences and access support from charities and the NHS. He said:

When I first started the venture with the Veterans’ Café, I never thought it would grow into something this big. I originally wanted to set this up for the veterans, so they had a place to meet, and talk to like-minded people with the same day to day issues. This has now brought the veteran community together, and is allowing veterans of all ages to get the help where needed. This would never have been possible without the help of South Ribble Council, and the veterans that support the café on a fortnightly basis.

Press release: Statement on killing of Kosovo-Serb politician Oliver Ivanovic

Sir Alan Duncan said:

We are deeply shocked and concerned by the killing of Oliver Ivanovic.

We call upon the Kosovo police and other rule of law institutions to investigate this incident thoroughly and bring those responsible to justice at the earliest opportunity.

It is particularly important that politicians and those in public life are able to operate without fear of violence. This is exactly the kind of violence that we wish to see eradicated from the Western Balkans.

Press release: Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson calls for a united front on North Korea at summit in Vancouver

Mr Johnson was speaking at a two day gathering in Vancouver jointly hosted by the US and Canada, focusing on security and stability on the Korean Peninsula.

The Foreign Secretary said:

There can be no doubt that the crisis is intensifying, we had 20 tests within the last year, 20 missiles, two of which flew over Japan, and one testing of a nuclear device.

It's very important and encouraging that the world is not being

intimidated or divided by the threat from North Korea and actually we have come together and in Resolution 2397 there was an unprecedented measure of global consensus about what to do and to intensify the political and economic pressure on the regime.

It's great that conversations are taking place between North Korea and South Korea and great there is an Olympic truce, but I hope people will recognise that the program is continuing in North Korea and that Kim Jong-un continues with his illegal program.

He can continue on the path of provocation and equipping his country with nuclear weapons that will lead to further escalation, further economic pain and hardship of his people or else he has an opportunity to go down a path that will lead to greater wellbeing for his people and a chance to emulate the astonishing achievements of the Republic of Korea (South Korea).

Further information

Follow the Foreign Secretary on Twitter: [@BorisJohnson](#) and [Facebook](#).

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Speech: Holocaust Educational Trust – Holocaust Memorial Day Reception

Last October at the Holocaust Educational Trust Appeal Dinner, I sat next to a man named Harry Spiro.

Unfortunately, Harry couldn't be here today but he was just 8 years old in 1939 when war broke out in Poland.

By 1945, aged just 14, he was the only member of his family to still be alive.

That evening, Harry told me his story.

In 1942, Harry was working in a factory in his home town of Piotrkow, when the call came from the Nazis for the workers to gather outside the nearby synagogue.

Harry didn't want to go, but his mother – anticipating that things were about to get much worse – insisted.

As she pushed him out, she said: "Hopefully one of us will survive."

Tragically, she – and the rest of Harry's family – were murdered at Treblinka.

But her words – and their message of hope and endurance through the darkest times – live on.

They live on through Harry, who survived a death march that killed 2,300 of the 3,000 who set off.

Her words live on through Harry's children and grandchildren.

And through Harry's exceptional work on Holocaust education, work for which he has just been awarded a British Empire Medal in the Queen's New Year's Honours list.

An honour he shares with Freda, another extraordinary survivor, who has just spoken so movingly.

My warmest congratulations to them both.

And now stories like Freda's and Harry's are inspiring a whole new generation through the work of fantastic young HET ambassadors, like Georgia (Adkins).

Thank you for everything you're doing to keep these stories, these words, alive.

They matter immensely.

We know, particularly from the world of instant of communication on social media how words can entertain us, educate us, unite us, and uplift us.

But, also, how they can wound and divide.

How they can inflame prejudice in echo chambers where ignorance goes unchallenged.

How they can drive people towards hatred and even violence.

So it's fitting that this year's Holocaust Memorial Day asks us to consider the power of words.

The [Holocaust Educational Trust](#) has never shied away from teaching young people where hatred, intolerance and misinformation can lead.

The way we use words and language is key to this.

Which is why the government has been proud to support HET's vital work through initiatives such as the [Lessons from Auschwitz programme](#).

This programme has enabled thousands of children and their teachers to understand a little of what it meant to live through.

What Harry Spiro described to me, as “hell on earth”.

In 2011, I was privileged to accompany a group from my constituency to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

It was one of the most moving experiences of my life.

The hateful inscription on the gate might be familiar, but there are no words to convey the feeling when you walk inside.

Of imagining all the men, women and children who perished there and whose cries were silenced forever.

Cries – against hatred, intolerance and misinformation – that we must ensure are heard.

We all have a duty to speak out in their memory.

Of course, Holocaust education is not the only answer.

But it remains one of the most powerful tools we have to fight bigotry today.

That’s why I am delighted to announce today that my Ministry – together with the Department for Education – will fund a new strand of the Lessons from Auschwitz programme.

A new initiative, proposed by HET and the Union of Jewish Students, to tackle antisemitism, prejudice and intolerance on university campuses.

I know this is something that the Trust has been keen to get off the ground.

And Karen – as anyone who knows her well will agree – is someone you do not turn down or disagree with!

So I hope this will be welcome news.

And I’d like to take this opportunity to thank Karen and everyone at the Trust for their tireless dedication to Holocaust education.

The programme will invite 2 Sabbatical Officers from each university to visit the death camps.

Vice-Chancellors will also be encouraged to take part.

I look forward to seeing how this work proceeds and the difference it makes.

HET’s work is invaluable and I’m honoured to be associated with it.

Not just because it’s the right thing to do, but because I have seen it works.

I remember Harry telling me about a visit to a school in London's East End.

When a pupil refused to attend his Holocaust presentation because he didn't want to, in the words of that pupil, "hear from Jews."

Harry refused to deliver his talk unless the young man was present.

And so he was persuaded, reluctantly, to attend Harry's talk.

That same young man later wrote to him and said it was one of the most moving experiences of his life.

So much so, he was inspired to become a passionate champion of greater tolerance and understanding among his peers.

So our efforts to tell stories like Harry's, to challenge antisemitism wherever it exists, are absolutely crucial.

Not just now, but for future generations.

This is the thinking behind our commitment to build a new national Holocaust Memorial and Learning Centre.

Its presence, right next to the Houses of Parliament, will ensure that the testimony of survivors will never be forgotten in Britain.

That the message of hope and a better future...

...whispered from a mother to son all those years ago...

...serves as a beacon for centuries to come.

Thank you.

Press release: Minister for the Middle East statement following meeting with Syrian Opposition

The UK continues to play a leading role in response to the tragedy in Syria. We have committed nearly £2.5bn to our humanitarian response to the crisis.

I am alarmed that in spite of commitments to de-escalation the regime and its backers continue to bomb and shell opposition areas in eastern Ghouta and Idlib. In recent weeks these regime offensives have killed hundreds of civilians, displaced tens of thousands, and destroyed hospitals and other civilian infrastructure. These attacks must stop.

After nearly seven years of conflict and over 400,000 deaths, it is abundantly clear that only a political settlement can bring a durable end to the human suffering and the regional instability the conflict fuels.

Along with our international partners, the UK supports the efforts of the UN-mediated Geneva process as we believe this is the best way of reaching a lasting political settlement to end the conflict. We commend the constructive engagement by Nasser Hariri and the Syrian opposition in the latest round of Geneva talks and call on the Syrian regime to likewise engage constructively and agree to direct talks.