

2019

REMEMBERING VICTIMS OF TERRORISM: A GUIDANCE DOCUMENT

Dignity Justice Truth



PREPARED BY

Victim Support Europe



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1. Introduction

Over the past 10 years, Europe has been the target of numerous terrorist threats and attacks, which have not only affected victims and their families, but have also affected society as a whole.

In the days after an attack, governments, communities and organisations are involved with the immediate needs of those affected. Spontaneous memorials, usually in the form of flowers and messages, often take place as people feel the need to come together in solidarity and recognition of the victims. However, plans to organise formal commemoration of the attack and its victims will soon be developed: involving different stakeholders with converging needs. This document looks to provide guidelines to support the organisation of remembrance events for victims and thus anticipate challenges that may arise for the organisers.

The EU 2012 Victims' Rights Directive highlights specific needs of victims of terrorism in terms of recognition and respect:

*"Victims of terrorism have suffered attacks that are intended ultimately to harm society. They may therefore need special attention, support and protection due to the particular nature of the crime that has been committed against them. Victims of terrorism can be under significant public scrutiny and often need social recognition and respectful treatment by society. Member States should therefore take particular account of the needs of victims of terrorism, and should seek to protect their dignity and security."*¹

One of the primary needs of victims of terrorism is that of recognition. As the concept of recognition is broad, it can be perceived and expressed in different ways. One form is that of commemoration: important both to direct and indirect victims, as acts of remembrance may bring a sense of solidarity in their loss. Furthermore, remembrance and commemoration are important steps in healing on a societal level as communities will often feel overwhelmed by grief and powerlessness in the face of the terror and violence of a terrorist attack.

Remembrance and commemoration can be observed by specific events and tributes: memorial services and sites can provide a physical space to convey the message of recognition as a sense of national solidarity with the victims' loss, recognition of individual and societal suffering, recognition that the terrorist attack and its consequences should never be forgotten, etc.

Memorial events and sites – spontaneous or formal or even online – honouring victims' memories express the act of remembrance and occupy an important place for those nations targeted by terrorist attacks or mass victimisation.

On an international level, governments and other agencies encourage the need for commemoration and remembrance of all victims of terrorism. After the Madrid Bombings in 2004, the EU established the European Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism on 11 March and since 2005, on this date, Europeans remember all victims of terrorist attacks, regardless of their nationality.

¹ Recital 16, Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime, and replacing Council Framework Decision 2001/220/JHA

The guidelines below present suggestions for the organisation of a formal memorial event and touch upon other activities that can support the remembrance and commemoration of victims of terrorism.

2. Organising a memorial event

Memorial events are an integral part of the victims' healing process: victim-sensitive suggestions for the organisation of a memorial event are presented below.

2.1. Victims at the heart of a memorial event

The **wishes of victims should be at the centre** of any memorial event; political, financial and practical arguments should be secondary to the victims' ideas, wishes and concerns.

The memorial event can be very difficult and emotional for victims: it is therefore important to ensure it is **victim-sensitive and honours victims in a respectful way**.

Memorial events can also be challenging for government, or other official, representatives: they are expected to show humanity and compassion and may find it hard to interact empathetically with victims as such an event may be out with their range of experience. However, this interaction can be of great importance to victims and is often referred to as a key moment: victims feel recognised, heard and seen after a few minutes of heartfelt, engaged and compassionate talk with these official representatives, thus increasing their trust in government or other institutions.

It is essential that there is **genuine consultation of and participation by** victims in the organisation of memorial events. However, the first hurdle will be identifying those who should be involved, which can take an extended period of time if the venue of the terrorist attack prohibited the immediate registration of direct victims. Whilst initially victims might not be readily identified, proactive efforts should be made to contact and consult those that wish to be involved; however, this should be done **sensitively, ensuring no further harm is caused**.

When victims' associations are formed and/or are ready to participate to memorial events, **the government should facilitate their participation and ownership of the event**. It is critical that victims are genuinely listened to, their suggestions taken on board and that where compromise is needed or suggestions are not feasible, explanations are provided in a transparent and sensitive way. Similarly, it is not uncommon for victims to have very strong and differing views about how a memorial should be organised so **a clear process for discussion and decision making** should be in place. It is also important to involve the families of victims in the development of the commemoration activities, using the community's social or religious resources. Often victims or relatives are not ready to be involved in the early stages but may become more interested as time goes by.

The process must allow victims to express themselves openly, allow for a respectful difference of views and enable a route for agreement where ownership of the event remains shared, which may be time consuming and complex. However, it should be kept in mind that it can be more damaging for victims to establish a consultation 'on paper' that doesn't genuinely listen to victims, than to not have any consultation at all. That way, the event itself will lose credibility.

2.2. Coordination and partners

Depending on the location of the attack, the coordination of a memorial event will be in the hands of various actors and groups: a Reception Center for the Relatives which organises the commemorations or memorial along with the families of victims (Canada), a cross departmental committee (UK), a company created for developing the 9/11 memorial (USA), or the office of the Prime Minister (Belgium).

In order to properly organise the event, different actors need to come together with the victims to prepare the commemoration activities. However, it is also important to identify the needs of the event and the partners who will actively be involved:

Need	Partner to be identified
Safety of participants	A national or local authority that can ensure the safety of all participants e.g. police, army, private security firm
Communication and invitations	A single partner is responsible for public communication and private invitations. Involve victim experts to ensure communication is done in a victim-sensitive way. The partner should be able to provide information in different languages.
Logistics	An organisation that is qualified and experienced in event logistics: attention to detail, 'special care' and sensitivity to victims' needs should be highlighted.
Psychosocial support	An acknowledged state or non-state actor with the necessary expertise and experience to provide support to, often, traumatised individuals, not only on-site but that can provide follow up if needed. If different partners are involved, coordination between them is essential.
Catering	Choose a catering partner that able to handle a relatively flexible number of participants with varying dietary requirements.
Transport	Governments should ensure that foreign victims are able to travel to the memorial event

2.3. Message and aim

As commemoration and remembrance are a primary need for victims of terrorism and society, **victims should be included in designing the message for the memorial event.** In times of crisis, anthropologists have analysed how rituals provide a way for social groups to regain balance and morale². Individual and collective rituals enable the expression of grief and can be therapeutic in helping communities come to terms with tragedy³.



Wreath of flowers for the European Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism, Brussels, 11 March 2019

For victims, memorial events can have several functions:

Recognition: A victim-focused memorial event recognises those affected by a terrorist attack, and the consequences they have faced.

Remembering: Remembering what has happened and showing that the event and its victims are remembered. It is a time to remember as a public, as a State, and offer an opportunity for victims to remember together. The memory of victims of terrorism is a key element of the recovery of both the direct, indirect victims as well as the whole society. It shows that the tragedy is not forgotten and at the same time holds a promise to work so it does not happen again.

Healing process: The commemoration can be an integral part of the healing process for victims, their relatives, families and anyone affected by a terrorist attack.

Coming together and sharing: A memorial event can be very important for victims to be with other victims, first responders and those who were affected by the attacks.

Find/meet other victims: Victims find it important to meet other victims, some go to commemoration events or services to meet the people that helped them, the people they shared the same experience with. These services become a unique opportunity to meet other victims, ensure they are doing well, ask questions, thanking them etc. Especially in the first months after the attack, victims can seek out contact with other victims to reconstruct their memory on the event. After previous attacks victims have expressed their need to speak to others to help them reconstruct the events.

² Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays, Bronislaw Malinowski, 1948, available at: https://monoskop.org/images/4/41/Malinowski_Bronislaw_Magic_Science_and_Religion_and_Other_Essays_1948.pdf

³ A. Eyre, In remembrance: post-disaster rituals and symbols. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 14(3), 23, 1999.

Speak to politicians, aid workers, supporters: For some victims it is important to get the opportunity to talk to and be listened by politicians. Meeting aid workers and victim supporters can be an important element for victims of terrorism.

Political statement of defiance: Memorials can also be seen as a political statement of defiance against those who carried out the attacks, and generally those who attack the values of the nation.

2.4. Programme and content

Memorial events often have familiar elements in their programmes, whilst all communicate varying messages or emotions. The needs of the victims' should be respected during the commemorations:

Victim(s) or a representative's speeches: the memorial event is dedicated to victims and they should be heard. Victims, or their representatives, should be invited to speak at the event.

Political or community speeches: as the event should be apolitical, speeches by politicians must be balanced by those from community and religious leaders; politicians must not be allowed to turn the event into a political rally as the event is about the victims not the politicians; diversity in the speakers and attendees' background should also be noted.



Ritual to commemorate victims: while the spoken words project the message of the memorial event, rituals can transcend words and can convey an important meaning to victims. Rituals can take disparate forms: laying down flowers, putting floating candle into a pond or fountain, calling out the names of victims, showing photographs etc.

[Ceremony of the European Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism, Brussels, 11 March 2019](#)

Music or poetry: what can't be said in words is often better expressed through music or poetry, though victims must always be consulted on the music or readings that are shared during the memorial.

Informal gathering: memorial events are times when victims can come together to share their experiences, grief and hopes for the future, but as this can be stressful, victims should also be able to designate a place and time to gather informally.

Prayer: depending on the context, prayers can form an important ritual of a memorial event. However, prayers should unite people, not divide different religions. At some memorial services, members of all major religions are invited to pray during the event.

2.5. Invitations and attendees

Personalised invitations for memorial events must be sent to victims well in advance of the event. As anniversary events may be planned months in advance, invitations should be sent out at least two months before the event to allow cross-border victims to attend. Good **planning and collaboration** can ensure that invitees are notified in good time and that they receive detailed information on the nature and organisation of the event to help them decide whether or not to attend. In the case of those physically unable to attend, organisers should include arrangements for the live streaming of the ceremony.

The aim should be to invite **all victims and all responders**, even those who will not be able to attend due to injuries or because of geographical distance. Financial uncertainty should not prevent victims from attending anniversaries, though it will be a consideration for some unless they are able to find external funding: some governments, the US and France, cover the costs for foreign victims to attend the day of remembrance.

Professional first responders are an important group to invite to the remembrance events, as they can be strongly impacted by the aftermath of the attack, yet are often overlooked. The opportunity to meet first responders, victim supporters, aid workers and fellow-victims may be a consideration in victim participation.

The **media** will expect to cover the memorial events; once invitations have been issued, a press briefing should be held to ensure that members of the media act respectfully towards the victims and their families⁴. Clear instructions should be in place on how the media is allowed to report the event: guidelines on filming, interviewing, etc. are necessary to protect victims from further harm during these, often emotional, events. Event organisers should inform the major participants that there will be media coverage as victims may wish to have some parts of the commemorations kept private. Attendees should also be aware of the media guidelines in order to allay any concerns they may have of being on public display, which might inhibit them from attending the events.

2.6. Psychosocial support

Commemorations can positively influence the healing process for victims of terrorism, but attending such events is often a very emotional, potentially destabilising, experience as victims may be faced with new information or suffer flashbacks about the attack.

Three periods can be identified for psychosocial support:

Prior to the event:

- Prepare the event well in advance to reduce any insecurity and confusion;
- Inform victims clearly on expectations (have detailed, advance information about the event program);
- Explain to victims and support workers the potential emotional impact these events can have;

⁴ Most days of remembrance, like the first anniversary of the Paris Attacks, consist of a public part with clear rules for media and a private part for the victims where media are not allowed. In Paris, clear rules were set up for journalists that prevented them from taking close-up images of victims or do intrusive interviews.

- Ensure that the family and relatives of victims receive psychosocial and psychological support in preparation for the event.

During the event:

- Ensure victims can bring their own support person of choice to the event;
- Ensure that psychosocial supporters are visible and approachable during the whole event;
- Ensure psychosocial supporters can provide victims with information on aftercare options;
- Ensure political actors and public figures are aware of the potential impact of their actions on the psychosocial well-being of victims;

After the event:

- Ensure those that wish to, can come together in a quiet place for family remembrance or to share experiences;
- Ensure the availability of psychosocial workers or psychologists able to respond to the specific needs of victims, their relatives or bereaved families;
- Ensure victims are contacted with the offer of appropriate aftercare or referral;
- Hold a debriefing for support workers or first responders.

2.7. Location

The location chosen for the memorial needs to respond to the following criteria:

Venue: as victims might find participation at the location of the attack emotionally challenging, it is important consider these fears and concerns when planning where to hold the commemorations.

Security: victims need to be assured that the memorial event will be take place under secure conditions as their fear of further attacks may otherwise prevent them from attending.

Take into account victims' ideas: victims might find it very difficult to come to the event where the attack took place. It is important to take those fears and concerns into account when planning the exact location of the memorial.

Accessibility: the event location should be easily accessible for all victims with physical handicaps.

Transportation: the event should be held at a location serviced by all forms of transport; however, as many victims may fear using public transport, they should have access to free car parking⁵.

Media: If media actors are to attend, clearly delineate the physical boundaries within which the press corps must remain.

Victims and families of victims should be welcomed warmly on arrival and given clear details on the programme. Information on psychosocial support workers should be given to them at this time.

As stated above, those who cannot attend the commemorations should be provided with other options of participation e.g. through audio-visual means. These alternatives should be easy to access

⁵ On the second anniversary of the Brussels attacks, victims attending the commemoration received free entry to the airport parking.

and use in order to allow the victims feel included. Non-attendees should be informed of all choices and their availability well in advance of the events.

Some victims might wish to return to the commemorative event site later; arrangements should be in place to make that possible.

Children should have a specific space to sit, participate or play.

2.8. Budget

The government should cover all costs of the memorial event; victims should not be asked to pay anything to participate or to organise the event. The costs for foreign victims to attend the event should be completely taken up by the host-State; this is in addition to any home-State funding that may be available to the participants.

3. Different forms of commemoration

Remembering victims of an act of terrorism can be done in a variety of ways: physical memorials, spontaneous memorials, online memorials, formally recognised days of remembrance and victims' groups.

3.1. Spontaneous memorials

Rapid public responses meet the need to physically express grief, unity and solidarity. In this form of memorial, there are no rigid rules; timing is flexible, messages vary, and methods of remembrance (silence/ protests/ music and arts/ prayers) may all come together in a single memorial. Typically, there is no or little coordination, as these are grassroots, citizen-lead actions.



Spontaneous memorial at the Place de la République in Paris after the attack in November 2015

After the Nice Attacks of 14 July 2016 hundreds of flowers, objects and messages were brought to the Promenade des Anglais. For months afterwards the spontaneous memorial brought together victims and community members to share their grief and sorrow, their messages of compassion at the location of the attack. In February of 2017, the city of Nice collected the objects in 150 boxes to be cleaned, photographed and archived. The victims of the Association Promenade des Anglais expressed their sadness with not having these tokens of memories in the open anymore, reminding them of their loss as well of the support received from strangers⁶.

The city of Manchester hosted a similar spontaneous memorial after the Manchester Bombings in May 2017. The Mayor expressed his conviction that the ‘sea of flowers’ which covered the square would remain until victims’ loved ones said otherwise⁷.

Schools in Brussels were invited to hold a ritual of transition when the objects, flowers and messages for the victims of the Brussels attacks were removed from one of the main squares two months after the attack⁸.

3.2. Physical memorials

Physical memorials such as statues, sculptures, engraved plaques, fountains, buildings and gardens are among the various monuments created to remember, honour and pay tribute to victims. These memorials are often located at the site of the attack (9/11 Memorial or Atocha Station), or at an easily accessed public space. Accessibility, safety, maintenance, and the surrounding environment (noise/light/neighbouring buildings) are factors to be considered when choosing the location for the monument.



9/11 Memorial, New York, USA

A physical monument carries social and political associations as it conveys implicit and explicit messages that are of significance for victims, family members, and the general public. However, these messages – images, statements, citations, names – usually transcend social, cultural and political differences, and promote honour, respect and remembrance for those involved in the

⁶ Paris Match, Nice archives the homage for the victims of the 14th of July attacks (*Nice archive les hommages aux victimes de l'attentat du 14 juillet*), 9 February 2017, available at: <http://www.parismatch.com/Actu/Societe/Nice-archive-les-objets-laises-en-hommage-aux-victimes-de-l-attentat-du-14-juillet-1185083>

⁷ Manchester Evening News, Sea of flowers in St Ann's Square will stay for as long as families want, councillor says, 31 May 2017, available at: <http://www.manchestereveningnews.co.uk/news/greater-manchester-news/sea-flowers-st-anns-square-13116514>

⁸ Het Laatste Nieuws, Remembrance carpet of flowers and candles on the Beurs square cleared (*Herdenkingstapijt van bloemen en kaarsen op Beursplein opgeruimd*), 20 May 2016, available at: <http://www.hln.be/hln/nl/36484/Aanslagen-Brussel/article/detail/2709654/2016/05/20/Herdenkingstapijt-van-bloemen-en-kaarsen-op-Beursplein-opgeruimd.dhtml>

associated event. It may take several years to design and construct a physical memorial as the consultation process must respect all the various functions of that memorial, which can be challenging due to the number of stakeholders involved.

3.3. Online memorials

Online memorials are virtual spaces dedicated to commemoration. Whether a dedicated website, social media post or blog, online memorials allow individuals to share in the grieving process from a distance and permit acts of commemoration to continue long after formal events have ended. Online memorials can also act as a platform for In Memoriam donations and fundraising.

3.4. Remembrance Day

Establishing a national, European or international day of remembrance promotes an annual sign of solidarity with all victims, their families and friends, as well as the wider community and may also act as a day which promotes peace over violence. Days of remembrance can have a variety of functions from remembering the victims, providing public and state-based recognition of the victims experience⁹ to making a statement of political defiance.

3.5. Peer support groups

In addition to other functions, peer support groups contribute to commemorating victims. Surviving victims, family members, friends and the wider community establish victims' groups and organisations to collectively remember, practice peer support and raise awareness. They are also often an important partner in the planning of commemorative events.

4. Conclusion

This short guide provides information and ideas on topic of commemorating and honouring victims of terrorism. Hosting a memorial event is a journey that can be emotionally difficult for its attendees but is important as part of the healing process for victims, who should be involved in all stages of its preparation and organisation in order to meet the expectations of diverse groups of family members and victims. Whilst memorial events present challenges to their organisers, they acknowledge the tragedy, honour the lives of victims and responders, and offer comfort to victims and the bereaved.

⁹ R. Egbo, Memorializing the Victims of Terrorism, available at: https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rr09_6/rr09_6.pdf

Resources on memorials and commemoration of victims of terrorism

Below is a short list of some of the resources specifically focused on memorials:

- Voices of 9/11, Preparing For After Resource Kit, 2014, available at: <http://www.voicesofseptember11.org/initiatives/preparing-after-resource-kit>
- Memorializing the Victims of Terrorism, Rina Egbo, Research and Statistics Division Department of Justice Canada, available at: https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rr09_6/rr09_6.pdf
- The Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice, <https://www.ovc.gov/welcome.html>
- J. Watkins, The value of disaster memorials and rituals, Mental Health Today, 2012, available at: <https://www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/the-value-of-disaster-memorials-and-rituals>
- Instituut Fysieke Veiligheid, 10 important tips (10 belangrijke tips), available at: https://www.ifv.nl/kennisplein/Documents/handreiking-herdenken_tips.pdf (in Dutch).
- Victim Support Europe, Infographic on memorials for victims of terrorism, available at: https://victimsupport.eu/activeapp/wp-content/files_mf/1550835357Honouringvictims1.pdf

HONOURING VICTIMS OF TERRORISM

Guidance on preparing a memorial event in the aftermath of a terrorist attack

INVOLVE VICTIMS

From the very beginning of the preparation phase, involve victims; listen to their ideas, ask for their help and guidance, determine the content of the memorial with - and for - the victims.



TIMING

As a general rule, allow at least 6 months to prepare. If you are planning a memorial close to the event, do so only when all funerals have been held. Keep the formal segment of the memorial relatively short e.g. 45 mins - 1 hour. Make victims' associations leading/key partners for anniversary events.

COORDINATION AND PARTNERS

Coordination of a memorial event may involve different actors and groups. Think about partners who can assist with: security and safety of participants, communication and invitations, logistics, preparation, psychological support, catering and transport.



SUPPORTING VICTIMS

Support for victims should be available at any time of the process: through the preparatory phase, during and after the event. Psychosocial supporters should be visible and approachable during the whole event. The support can take different forms: peer support, professional support services or psychological counselors.



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MEMORIALS

Exploring the various approaches to commemorating victims of terrorism

PHYSICAL

Physical memorials are among the most common ways to commemorate victims of terrorism. Statues, sculptures, engraved plaques, fountains, buildings and gardens are among the various monuments created to remember, honour and pay respect to victims.

LOCATION: Often physical memorials are at the site of the attack (9/11 Memorial, Atocha Station), it can also be a public space easily accessible by all. Accessibility, safety, maintenance, and the surrounding environment (noise/light/neighbouring buildings) are very important factors when considering the location of a physical memorial.

MESSAGE: Physical monuments carry social and political implications. They convey implicit and explicit messages that are of significance for victims, family members, and the general public. Images, statements, citations, names of victims can be found on physical memorials to remember, honour and pay respect to victims. Messages usually transcend social, cultural and political differences, and promote respect and remembrance.



SPONTANEOUS

Rapid public responses meet the need to physically express grief, unity and solidarity. In this form of memorial, there are no rigid rules; timing is flexible, messages vary, and methods of remembering (silence/ protests/ music and arts/ prayers) may all come together in a single memorial. Typically, there is no or too little coordination, as these are grassroots, citizen-lead actions.



REMEMBRANCE DAY

Establishing a national, European or international day of remembrance is an annual sign of solidarity with victims, deceased victims and their families and friends, as well as the wider community. This may also act as a day which promotes peace over violence.



ONLINE

Online memorials are virtual spaces dedicated to commemoration. Whether a dedicated website, social media post or blog, online memorials allow individuals to share in the grieving process from distance, and permit continued acts of commemoration long after formal events have ended. Online memorials have little environmental impact and can also act as a platform for In Memoriam donations and fundraising.



VICTIMS' GROUPS

Surviving victims, family members, friends and the wider community establish victims' groups and organisations as a way to collectively remember, practice peer support and raise awareness.

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