

Esther Hyman

Sister of the late Miriam Hyman, victim of the London Bombings 2005

"First I send my apologies for not being able to join you today. After gathering for my sister, Miriam Hyman, two years in a row at a park in London where we played as children; family and friends decided to make this an annual tradition. I am spending the day with Miriam's loved-ones, and my experience so far tells me that this is the best way to provide and receive support at this difficult time.

I was touched by Tolerance International's invitation to join you at this commemorative event, and I do regret not being able to attend. Please accept this message of support instead, and know that I will be thinking of you, releasing fifty-two white balloons, one for each victim of the London bombings.

I would like to add my voice to those who call for mutual tolerance, on a personal and a global scale. No matter what our religion or creed, the sanctity of life seems undeniable, and it follows that our neighbour's child is as precious as our own.

I feel lucky to live in a diversely multicultural society. The rich tapestry that is our heritage is endlessly interesting and absorbing. We must learn to focus on what connects us, and to appreciate our differences as a source of edification and delight. Miriam and I ourselves are a mix of English and Indian blood, of the East and the West, and I have always seen this as an advantage!

One day in August 2005, a recently built mosque in my area of East Oxford opened its doors to the public. After much deliberation, I went to their open day and introduced myself and explained my circumstances. I told them that I was there to extend a hand of friendship, and to make sure that they knew that I did not blame the Muslim community for the actions of the radicalised few. This turned out to be a cathartic experience for me, and I have maintained contact with the young men and women who formed the Oxford Islam and Muslim Awareness Project. I hope to be able to promote good relations between the Muslim population and the wider community.

I feel as if I am preaching to the converted. I know that those gathered at this commemoration will be like-minded people, with the interests of all of the community at heart. I wish you well for your mission to promote tolerance between all peoples".