In 1996, the Imperial War Museum chose to mark the millennium by creating two new exhibitions: *The Holocaust Exhibition* which opened in 2000, and *Crimes against humanity: an exploration of genocide and ethnic violence* which opened in 2002.

The *Crimes against humanity* exhibition uses a thirty-minute film which addresses some of the common features of genocide and ethnic violence under five key themes: ‘Lives threatened’, ‘Perpetrators’, ‘How the world responds’, ‘Trial and punishment’ and ‘Aftermath’. It uses footage of ethnic conflict around the world to tell this story, as well as the testimony of survivors of the genocides in Rwanda, Bosnia and Cambodia, and interviews with journalists, representatives from NGOs and academics. The film is supported by an interactive database which explores crimes against humanity which have occurred in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, along with a section on future flashpoints, where ethnic conflict is at risk of occurring in future. We update this database as regularly as we can – it was last updated in 2008, and a further update will follow shortly.

The *Crimes against humanity* exhibition, as Suzanne Bardgett, Project Director has described, ‘recognises the changing face of warfare in recent decades - which increasingly sees civilians becoming the target of organised violence’. As a consequence of this change, IWM has identified crimes against humanity and genocide as being relevant topics for us to address with our audiences, especially given the Museum’s commitment to interpreting controversial and difficult subjects, particularly contemporary issues.

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1 *Crimes against humanity* briefing document for the exhibition team
Engaging with this history has, however, not been without its challenges. Firstly, the Museum’s collections on genocide and crimes against humanity are relatively small and so to achieve our mission to enrich people’s understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war, we have moved away from the traditional object-based exhibition narrative, and instead used an audiovisual presentation in the exhibition. Alongside this, we have developed our interpretation through events delivered in partnership with other organisations such as universities and NGOs.

Furthermore, interpreting such recent history can be politically sensitive. Dr Mark Levene, the Museum’s adviser for the exhibition, who teaches a course on comparative genocide at the University of Southampton, warned the project team of the challenges in addressing these issues:

‘What you have to realise is that the Holocaust is a safe genocide. The Germans have apologised for it. With this exhibition you risk offending large numbers of people.’

The process of creating the exhibition has therefore ensured that IWM has developed an awareness of the need for impeccable research and care when investigating and interpreting genocide and crimes against humanity to the public. As a result, our public programming has drawn heavily on the advice of the academic community to ensure that what we present to the public is both accurate and historically robust, and reflects, where appropriate, the plurality of opinion on the sometimes contentious issues which our analyses might entail.

Whilst IWM covers a large subject matter, of which crimes against humanity is but one small part, we have sought to develop events where possible, working with different organisations which seek to bring a greater awareness of genocide. I will explain some of our key activities here.

**The Rwanda Forum**

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3 Suzanne Bardgett, ‘Explaining Genocide’ in *Journal for the Association of Heritage Interpretation.*
In 2004 the Imperial War Museum decided to hold the Rwanda Forum, an event organised by the youth network Never Again, an international student organisation, co-founded by Poppy Sebag-Montefiore slide, a student at University College London. This organisation aimed to really transform that phrase, as Poppy has described, from a familiar ‘soundbite’ to a true ‘call to action’. 4 The idea for this event was initiated two years earlier when Poppy participated in a Never Again exchange visit in Rwanda with other international members of the organisation-listening to survivors, visiting sites associated with the genocide, speaking to political representatives, educators and perpetrators, and sharing experiences and reflections with fellow students. Poppy describes the visit as enabling the students to gain ‘a sense of Rwandans’ responses to what they saw as the truth of their – and their country’s – experience so that they might recognise the difficulties faced by individuals and communities. Their approach was not one of a professional historian attempting to interpret events, but as individuals responding to their own interactions with others.

The group wanted to communicate their experiences in the UK, and to start to try to begin to reverse a failure ‘to think critically about our own past (in) actions towards the genocide. They decided to invite the Never Again Rwanda members back to the UK to share their experiences there. Never Again approached IWM about hosting the event. Initially there was significant nervousness about working on this topic at the museum, however eventually it was recognised that such an event would enable members of the public to learn and grapple with the issues raised by this genocide slide.

Funding was sought from a variety of organisations and individuals connected to the subject, and financial support was received from The History Channel and The Guardian newspaper. Then IWM and Never Again set about establishing the programme for the day - deciding how such a sensitive history should be broached. In the end, four themes were addressed: ‘Between history and memory’ (an

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introductory session to the themes and problems of the genocide); ‘United Nations (response and responsibility)’; ‘Personal Protest – Public reaction’ (which explored, in particular how journalists and NGO representatives covered the genocide) and ‘Visions for the future’.

Poppy has summed up the thinking behind the plans for the forum:

The Rwanda Forum did not attempt a Rwandan history. We did not try to unravel the causal web of factors that culminated in Rwandans turning on their neighbours and friends. The Forum was not a battleground of competing histories of the genocide that would detract from the broader questions ... The Forum programme...created a ‘history of the present’: we were working in the territory between history, journalism and politics.  

The keynote speaker at the Rwanda Forum was Lieutenant General Romeo Dallaire slide, Force Commander of UNAMIR, who tried to halt the genocide, but whose warnings and requests for reinforcements went unheeded. His statement expresses the issue which we hoped this event might address, namely that:

The international community has as a fundamental fault the inability to rise above self-interest and to achieve the level of humanity that considers every human, human. 

In response, the event focused on the role and responsibility that ‘individuals and global citizens’ have to understand and learn about these events, and how the international community responded, and should respond to them. A key principle then was hoping to raise awareness of human rights and develop an understanding of what our responsibilities to one another are. Most importantly, by allowing survivors themselves to share their experiences at a conference in the UK, IWM and

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Never Again also hoped to facilitate a better understanding of the consequences resulting when international intervention is not forthcoming.

Survivors slide, such as Emmanuel Ruhara shown here, spoke about their responses to the genocide and their experiences in Rwanda today. Jean Baptiste Kayigamba, who lost several members of his family, spoke of having no other wish except to be understood; while Emmanuel Uwurukundo described ‘the long journey to go’ to achieve that both within Rwanda, but particularly elsewhere. In a context where some survivors did feel that the international community had abandoned their country, it was important for them to be given that voice again. Thus their inclusion in this programme was seen as fundamental.

The forum interposed the presentations and panels with readings of poetry and other literary pieces. In this way, it was hoped that we could help to highlight a cultural legacy of the genocide in Rwanda, using personal responses to help inform popular understanding of events. The project, Rwanda: écrire par devoirs de memoirs for example was introduced by Veronique Tadjo slide one of several artists and writers involved in building a pan-African memory of the event, who read from her book The Shadow of Imana (the name used for God in Kenya and Rwanda). Ballet Nganzo slide from Rwanda also performed. The ballet is formed of child survivors of the genocide from the three main ethnic groups in Rwanda: Hutu, Tutsi and Twa. The Rwanda Forum functioned then not just as a conference, but also as a form of commemoration.

IWM also tried to ensure that Rwandan politics contemporaneous to the Forum did not dominate the discussion - a concern which has been important when interpreting such historical events already loaded with challenges. At the end of the forum however, participants did discuss how to foster unity, forge national identity and teach the subject in Rwanda today, as well as looking at the quest for justice. The final section took this notion very seriously, hearing from a representative of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, a member of the Executive Committee of the Africa Leadership Forum, the Director of External Affairs of the European Union and the President of Genocide Watch.
IWM then, at the Rwanda Forum, acted as host in order to facilitate greater awareness of the genocide, but also provided a space for key players in politics, academia and education to foster links and share experiences. By collaborating with an NGO like Never Again, we hoped to help share ideas to enable the recovery of Rwanda from this terrible chapter in its history.

**Srebrenica Massacre**

Following the success of the Rwanda Forum, in 2005, the Museum held an event to commemorate and raise awareness of the massacre in Srebrenica, ten years on. This event saw a similar format to the Rwanda Forum reproduced in response to the then Head of Holocaust and Genocide History, Suzanne Bardgett’s involvement in the creation of a new memorial at Potocari slide, the site of the former UN base and designated ‘safe area’ near which up to 7000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys were murdered by the Serbian army.

Professor James Gow, a specialist in war crimes and the Yugoslav War at King’s College London led the programme for the event with support received from, among others, the BBC and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. This event looked critically at events leading up the massacre. Again IWM sought high profile and knowledgeable partners who would ensure the discussion was an authoritative and balanced one.

Paddy Ashdown (then High Representative in Bosnia-Herzegovina) introduced the seminar speaking about the difficult efforts to rebuild Bosnia after the genocide which had taken place there during the Yugoslav war. This was followed by an examination of the causes and course of the genocide beginning with a critical look at the role of the UN and the so-called ‘safe area’, examining an event which the UN itself described in 1999 as one which would ‘haunt our history forever.’

The motives of perpetrators were also considered by a representative from the International Criminal Court. We also invited speakers to reflect on the efforts to

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memorialise the genocide through the creation of the new memorial; alongside which continued the ongoing excavation of mass graves, and efforts to identify and rebury victims of the genocide.

IWM also premiered documentary maker Leslie Woodhead’s powerful film *Srebrenica: Never Again?*, the follow-up to his acclaimed 1999 film *A Cry from the Grave*. The film looks at the history and definition of the term genocide, and explains what happened in Srebrenica in 1995. It then follows the people of Srebrenica as they attempt to come to terms with this history, and seek justice for the crimes against humanity which were committed there.

As one commentator in the film, Samantha Power, of the Human Rights Centre in Harvard explained: ‘It is not a coincidence or a failure that genocide is allowed again and again; it is a product of our own foreign policy that is not tailored to integrate a regard for human life.’ Again then, IWM sought to provide a forum through which to question the value placed on human rights in the context of genocide.

Very fortuitously, an accident of circumstance helped to raise the profile of the event further than was initially hoped. On the same day HRH Prince Charles was visiting the Museum for another event. It was arranged that he would meet Raisu I Ulama Dr Mustafa Ceric, Bosnia’s most senior Muslim cleric. Pictures of their meeting slide then secured further coverage of this event in the Bosnian press – helping to bring attention to our event both in the UK and crucially in the former Yugoslavia itself.

**Osman Ahmed’s Displaced**

Our next activity exploring recent crimes against humanity was an art exhibition in 2008 showcasing the work of Osman Ahmed, a Kurdish artist who reflects on the plight of his people during the Anfal, the Iraqi suppression and massacres against the Kurds in the 1980s. The exhibition was called *Displaced* and drew on Ahmed’s own experience as a refugee from Iraq in 1988. Osman Ahmed is pictured here slide

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with his artwork Nugra Salman Camp, which shows columns of people interned in a camp where many perished.

Osman described his art on display at the Museum thus:

Since witnessing the genocide in 1988, every drawing has been a renewal of my pledge; every tableau is a meeting place where memories and flashbacks spring to life out of chaos.

This exhibition is giving me a chance to witness a journey – my journey – that started when I was young, witnessing my nation being ill-treated by Saddam’s regime. This journey has taken me here today, to the Imperial War Museum, amongst a rich collection of evidence of war and crimes against humanity.  

Ahmed then recognised the importance of showcasing his work at IWM, and bringing an audience, who might have been motivated to visit the museum for quite different reasons, the opportunity to see his work. Being a survivor himself brings a unique perspective to his work, and through this medium, we hoped to attract another audience, one who might not visit our Crimes against humanity exhibition, or attend a related event.

Head of Collections, Roger Tolson, described the images as ‘an eloquent and moving testimony of the impact of war on individuals and communities’. They also help to facilitate an understanding of the far-reaching and devastating consequences of crimes against humanity.

War crimes, genocide, prosecution and pictures

Continuing work begun with an art installation on Osman Ahmed’s Displaced, our next seminar which is to take place next week will be covering War crimes, genocide, prosecution and pictures. Recognising the role of visual media in

interpreting history and current affairs today, we again will draw on such sources to present new research about prosecution for crimes against humanity to the public.

For this event we have again made partnerships - working with King’s College London, who are spearheading the programme, with support from the AHRC Beyond Text programme.

In this event we will seek to disseminate the results of the research of one of our own recent Collaborative Doctoral Award students, Dr Kevin Reynolds, and his work on the use of film footage at Nuremberg. We will also screen a series of film clips which show evidence of war crimes against the Kurdish community in Iraq, compiled by Gwynne Roberts, a documentary film maker whose company has gathered a substantial archive of footage from the genocide in Iraq followed by a discussion of this material with representatives of the Anfal genocide memory programme.

The event will also look at images and film from the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia which will be followed by discussion with Mirko Klarin, Director and Founder, Sense News Agency, The Hague.

IWM hopes one of its strengths lies in opening up academic research into genocide and war crimes to the wider public, enabling its accessibility by all. This helps to ensure that our coverage of events is authoritative, whilst still remaining sensitive to the difficulties of working with challenging histories.

If you are in London and would like to attend War Crimes, genocide, prosecution and pictures, please do come and speak to me, or contact me by email at efuggle@iwm.org.uk or research@iwm.org.uk.