

Iran to Host Holocaust Deniers Conference

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Jerusalem (CNSNews.com) - Iran reportedly plans to host a conference of Holocaust deniers in the coming weeks, much to the concern of some Israelis.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad sparked international anger when he said late last year that the Holocaust was a myth and suggested that if Europe were so upset about it, Europe should provide land for a Jewish State. Ahmadinejad's comments came just weeks after he said that Israel should be "wiped off the map."

The Association of Islamic Journalists in Iran has been tasked with putting together an international conference to offer a platform "to examine in-depth this myth" of the Holocaust, according to the Italian News Agency AKI.

Iranian affairs expert Menashe Amir said that he expected prominent Holocaust deniers, representatives from terrorist groups and Muslim extremists from around the world to attend the conference in Iran.

Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes Remembrance Authority, said it was concerned that Iran was attempting to "paint its radical agenda with a scholarly brush."

Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate Avner Shalev warned against international complacency in light of Iran's "genocidal declarations."

"Recent trends in Iran represent a clear feature of current anti-Semitism -- the ties between Islamic radicals and Holocaust deniers," Shalev said in a statement. "Iran has embraced such charlatans as David Irving."

Revisionist historian Irving lost a libel suit in a British court against writer Deborah Lipstadt and Penguin books. Lipstadt called Irving one of the world's most dangerous "Holocaust deniers" in her 1994 book, "Denying the Holocaust."

"Sham historians" such as Irving have been totally discredited by the West but have found a "responsive audience" in Iran, "where senior officials have called the factual events of the Holocaust 'a matter of opinion,'" said Shalev.

Shalev noted that the United Nations recently recognized the importance of remembering the Holocaust "as a safeguard against the breakdown of the basic human values that underpin our civilization."

The U.N. passed a resolution three months ago establishing January 27 as an international day for Holocaust remembrance.

"The dismissal of the veracity of the Holocaust and its legacy represents a clear rejection of those values. The international community must act to

prevent genocidal intentions from becoming genocidal capabilities," he said.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said that the world should be very concerned about the combination of Iran's radical ideology and the possibility of the regime obtaining nuclear weapons.

"The Holocaust denial by the regime in Iran is not only offensive and racist but it also demonstrates the mindset of the extremist regime in Tehran," said Regev.

"The combination of an extremist ideology, a distorted view of reality together with nuclear weapons is a combination that should concern every thinking individual."

Iran announced earlier this week that it would continue its research in uranium enrichment, a necessary ingredient for making an atomic bomb, raising concerns in the West that Iran is drawing closer to obtaining nuclear weapons.

According to the Jerusalem Post on Thursday, Israel will push for international condemnation of the conference.

But Regev would only say that Israel has raised the issue of Iran -- both its Holocaust denial and its nuclearization -- in its discussions with friendly governments.

Dr. Efraim Zuroff, director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Jerusalem, said the "real question" about the conference is how the world will respond.

"If this is merely a gathering to support the outrageous comments of President Ahmadinejad about the Holocaust obviously it will...serve no worthy purpose," Zuroff said.

If on the other hand experts were invited to "explain, teach and present the overwhelming evidence about the Holocaust then it would be a step in the right direction," he said. "It's the most documented genocide...ever committed in history."

"The real question that should be considered now is not the ridiculous statements [that will come out of the conference] but what the informed Western world will do in response," Zuroff added.

Amir said this would be the first time that such a conference is being held in Iran.

Such conferences have been held previously, but in 2001 Lebanon cancelled a conference of Holocaust revisionists under international pressure.

Holocaust deniers or revisionists maintain either that the Holocaust never occurred or that there was no organized plot to get rid of the Jewish people. They say the Holocaust has been used as a Jewish or Zionist propaganda tool in order to gain sympathy in the world.

"Most Iranians don't have knowledge about the Holocaust," said Amir. And

the religious and extremist leaders say that even if it did happen, they don't care, he added.

Some Iranians, including politicians and journalists, oppose the statements of Ahmadinejad, Amir said.

According to Amir, the Persian-language website Baztab wrote that denying the crimes of German dictator Adolf Hitler would clear him of guilt but there is no doubt that Hitler committed many crimes, including the extermination of the Jews.

Amir said he did not believe the threat of referring Iran to the U.N. Security Council would stop the country from pursuing its nuclear goals. Iran is sure that China and Russia (permanent members on the Security Council) would veto any threat of sanctions, he said.

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