



## Leaders Take on Tsunami of Religious Hate

Thursday, June 21, 2007

By Abraham Cooper and Alfred Balitzer



Sol Teichman, left, Holocaust survivor, and Tzippy Cohen, injured in deadly suicide bombing attack at Jerusalem's cafe Hillel, are shown.

**The tsunami of violence and terror swamping the Middle East is propelled by threats from leaders justifying hate in the name of God.**

The headlines keep tumbling out with horrific consistency.

Gaza: Christians who engage in "missionary activity" will be "dealt with harshly."

A Muslim cleric has announced new rules for Gaza's tiny Christian minority already reeling from the ransacking of their school and house of worship where crosses were broken, a statue of Jesus damaged and prayer books burnt.

The few remaining priests and nuns will be safe as long as they adhere to Muslim law, according to Sheik Abu Saqer, leader of Jihadia Salafiya, an Islamic outreach movement that recently announced the opening of a "military wing" to enforce Muslim law in Gaza.

Karachi: Protesters carried signs this week saying they were "ready to kill" over the queen's knighthood for Sir Salman Rushdie.

Supporters of Pakistan's Religious Party held a protest rally to condemn the British government's awarding knighthood to Rushdie.

The Pakistani government summoned the British ambassador to protest the Rushdie knighthood, denouncing the author for "offensive and insulting writings" against Islam. Upping the ante, Pakistani Religious Affairs Minister Ejaz-ul-Haq told Parliament that the British honor contributes to "insulting Islam" and may lead to terrorism.

Tehran: On June 15, during a speech at an Islamic seminary school, Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad charged: "Ideologies deviating from God's teachings are being spread with dollars in the name of Judaism and Christianity around the world. Those who are doing this are saying they want to save humanity, whereas the only way to save humanity is Islam."

This is the first time Ahmadinejad has accused Jews and Christians of spreading blasphemy. This unprecedented attack comes on the heels of the Iranian leader's repeated threats against Israel and his ongoing campaign of Holocaust denial.

According to Iranian Aftab News agency, Ahmadinejad's slander of Christianity and Judaism won the support of senior parliamentarian Moosa Ghorbani, who condemned former Iranian presidents for not making similar statements: "Islam completes other religions," the parliamentarian asserted, adding that, therefore, "other religions are not accepted by God."

In the midst of the din of extremism and hate, where are moderate leaders of Islam?

Well, last week we found a few, and in the world's most populous Muslim nation, Indonesia.

Under the patronage of Indonesia's former President Abdurrahman Wahid, the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Museum of Tolerance and LibForAll Foundation convened 100 imams, Islamic and Hindu students to interact with Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Buddhist and Christian theologians in Bali -- site of one of the bloodiest suicide bombing attacks on civilians to confront religious-sanctioned terror and hate.

Dispensing with the usual Orwellian political correctness, Wahid publicly condemned the Iranian leader: "President Ahmadinejad is a friend, but when he lies about the Holocaust he is wrong and I say so publicly."

In an op-ed for The Wall Street Journal, which Wahid co-authored with former Israeli Chief Rabbi and Holocaust survivor, Israel Lau, the leader of 40 million Muslims went further:

"By lying about the events of the past, the deniers are paving the way toward the crimes of the future. ... Let us be clear: The real purpose of Holocaust denial is to degrade and dehumanize the Jewish people.

"By denying or trivializing the murder of six million Jews by the Nazis and their Allies, the deniers are seeking to advance their notion that the victims of the 20th Century's greatest crime are, in fact, that Century's greatest victimizers. ... Indeed, the deniers are perpetrating what is, in effect, a second genocide.

"Extinguished as they were from the ranks of the living, Hitler's Jewish victims are now, in effect, to be extinguished from the ranks of the dead," Wahid and Lau wrote.

Ironically, Rabbi Lau was refused a visa for the gathering because he carries an Israeli Diplomatic passport. Indonesia does not recognize the Jewish state.

But Jerusalem's Rabbi Daniel Landes was permitted to attend and with Wahid and Hindu leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar were the first to sign a "Call to Action" condemning the linkage between religion and violence and condemning the justification by religious leaders of violence.

Some crucial milestones were achieved that day in the world's largest Muslim nation. Members of the Jewish religion, including a rabbi from Israel were invited to the table as equals. They and religious figures of four other faiths openly interfaced with young Indonesians and the media.

We heard Muslim leaders explicitly condemn suicide terror and Holocaust denial while openly weeping with survivors of suicide bombings in Indonesia and Israel and embracing a Jewish survivor of the Nazi Holocaust.

As the world keeps score of the madness spawned by religion, let's give echo to the words of Yusuf Chudlari, a popular Indonesian cleric and member of one of the world's largest Muslim organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama, who heads an Islamic boarding school with more than 4,000 students.

"I previously thought that Jewish people were not good for the way they treat Palestinians, but after listening to the rabbis here, I am beginning to see that our ideas are actually very similar," he told the International Herald Tribune.

"I hope that from this conference my students will learn that all religions have the same goals and that being good to each other is the most important thing," he said. "The reason prejudice exists is because there is no communication between different people."

*Rabbi Abraham Cooper is associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. Dr. Alfred Balitzer is senior fellow at Claremont Graduate University and chairman of Pacific Research & Strategies, Inc. They served as co-moderators of the religion summit in Bali.*