

Indonesian Conference Denounces Holocaust Denial

By Fitri Wulandari | 12 Jun 2007 08:53:50 GMT



Rabbi Daniel Landes (R), director of the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, accompanied by former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid (C) and Sri Sri Ravishankar (L) from India, speaks during a religious leaders meeting in Bali June 12, 2007. Indonesia's resort island of Bali hosted on Tuesday a meeting of religious leaders partly aimed at countering an Iranian-backed conference last year that questioned the existence of the Holocaust. REUTERS/Murdani Usman

JIMBARAN, Indonesia, June 12 (Reuters) - Indonesia's resort island of Bali hosted on Tuesday a meeting of religious leaders partly aimed at countering an Iranian-backed conference last year that questioned the existence of the Holocaust. The privately backed event, co-sponsored by the U.S.-based LibForAll Foundation and the Wiesenthal Centre's Museum of Tolerance, included leaders from various religions, as well as Holocaust survivors and victims of terrorist attacks.

Former Indonesian president Abdurrahman Wahid, who is a patron of the LibForAll organisation aimed at countering Muslim extremism, told the conference that Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who has described the Holocaust as a "myth", was falsifying history.

"I visited Auschwitz's Museum of Holocaust and I saw many shoes of the dead people in Auschwitz. Because of this, I believe Holocaust happened," said Wahid, who led the world's

most populous Muslim nation between 1999 to 2001.

Wahid, often affectionately known as "Gus Dur", previously also headed Nahdlatul Ulama, one of Indonesia's largest Muslim organisations with an estimated 30 million members.

"Although I am a good friend of Ahmadinejad, but I have to say that he is wrong," the former president added. Ahmadinejad's government hosted a conference in December saying it wanted to allow researchers from countries where it is a crime to question the killing of 6 million Jews by the Nazis to speak freely.

"This is important. Courage to say the right thing. I don't have favouritism here. The Jews, Europeans, Arabs are all the same," Wahid told the conference.

Security for the event in a five-star hotel was tight. Bali is a Hindu enclave in Indonesia, but has suffered attacks by Islamic militants, including the 2002 nightclub bombings that killed more than 200 people, mostly foreign tourists.

About 85 percent of Indonesia's 220 million people are Muslims. Most are moderates although there is an increasingly vocal radical fringe.

The conference included representatives from several faiths.

As well as Muslim leaders, it included a Catholic priest, a Buddhist and Sri Sri Ravishankar, a Hindu leader.

Victims of the Bali bombings, an Australian woman who was wounded by a suicide bomb in Jerusalem, and a Holocaust survivor also attended.

A conference communique urged religious leaders to avoid manipulating religion for political purposes.

"A blessing for all creation, religion is a constant reminder to humanity of the divine spark in every person. Yet today the world shudders as horrific acts are justified in the name of religion," said Rabbi Daniel Landes, director of the Pardes Institute of Jewish Studies, who read the communique.

Indonesia does not have diplomatic ties with Israel, and Jakarta, along with Qatar, delayed on Friday a proposed U.N. Security Council statement condemning comments by Iran's president that forecast the destruction of Israel.