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The Morality of History — Holocaust Denial in Iran

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What do we do with those who deny the Holocaust? This is not a new question, but the two-day conference that drew Holocaust deniers to Iran has put the question back on the front pages.

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad convened the meeting, drawing international outrage and indignation.

According to *The Boston Herald*:

Anger over the conference could further isolate Iran as the West considers sanctions in the standoff over Tehran's nuclear program.

But Ahmadinejad appeared to revel in his meeting Tuesday with conference delegates, shaking hands with American participants and sitting near six anti-Israel Jewish participants, dressed in black ultra-Orthodox coats and hats.

"The Zionist regime will be wiped out soon the same way the Soviet Union was, and humanity will achieve freedom," Ahmadinejad said during Tuesday's meeting in his offices, according to the official IRNA news agency.

More:

Ahmadinejad has used anti-Israeli rhetoric and cast doubt on the Holocaust to rally anti-Western supporters at home and abroad, particularly in Asia and the Middle East. Several times he has referred to the Holocaust as a "myth" used to impose the state of Israel on the Arab world.

"The Holocaust is the device used as the pillar of Zionist imperialism, Zionist aggression, Zionist terror and Zionist murder;" David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan leader and former state representative in Louisiana, told The Associated Press.

Ahmadinejad announced the conference would set up a "fact-finding commission" to determine whether the Holocaust happened or not. The commission will "help end a 60-year-old dispute," he said.

The Tehran conference was touted by participants and organizers as an exercise in academic freedom and a chance to openly consider whether 6 million Jews really died in the Holocaust, away from Western taboos and the restrictions imposed on scholars in Europe, where some countries have made it a crime to deny the Nazi genocide during World War II.

It gathered 67 writers and researchers from 30 countries, most of whom argue that either the Holocaust did not happen or that it was vastly exaggerated. Many have been jailed or fined in France, Germany or Austria, where it is illegal to deny the Holocaust.

There can be no legitimate doubt that the Holocaust happened — that Adolf Hitler's hatred of the Jews led to the murder of over 6-million Jews in death camps spread throughout the eastern lands occupied by the Third Reich. In addition, millions of non-Jews deemed "life unworthy of life" were



exterminated by the regime.



The agenda behind the Holocaust deniers is the rewriting of history. Many Muslims, like Ahmadinejad, believe that the Holocaust gave moral legitimacy to the establishment of Israel as a state. The Holocaust was part of the political and historical context that gave birth to the Jewish state, driven by the slogan and pledge, “never again.”

Ahmadinejad, along with his fellow travelers, wants to deny the Holocaust in order to undermine support for Israel as a state. The presence of assorted kooks and crazies at the conference points to the underlying reality.

The White House called the conference “an affront to the entire civilized world.” Britain’s Prime Minister Tony Blair described the conference as “shocking beyond belief.” As *The Boston Globe* reported:

A gathering of Holocaust deniers in Iran touched off a firestorm of indignation across Europe, where many countries have made it a crime to publicly disavow the systematic extermination of 6 million Jews by the Nazis.

Should denying the Holocaust be a crime? No. Our commitment to free speech means that even the most reprehensible and offensive arguments are protected. The answer is not to make denying the Holocaust a criminal act, but to ensure that such denials are recognized as immoral denials of history — reflecting the most insidious forms of racism, anti-Semitism, and hatred.

History is one great series of moral questions. What happened? Why? Could it have been otherwise? What motivated the actors? What does it mean for us now? These questions and more frame the most important debates about history. Denying the Holocaust is an affront to human dignity and an insult to its millions of victims.

