REVISIONIST EUROPEAN RABBIS DENY THE ARMENIAN GENOCIDE

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By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier, 11 September 2023

The Rabbinical Center of Europe sent a letter on Sept. 6 signed by 50 conservative Rabbis to Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and President Vahagn Khachaturyan, telling them that Armenian officials have no right to use the term 'genocide' to describe Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin Corridor since December 2022, causing the starvation of 120,000 Artsakh Armenians.

The Rabbis wrongly claimed that the term genocide should only be used to describe the Jewish Holocaust. These Rabbis' ignorance is only exceeded by their arrogance. Not only do they not know the true meaning of the term 'genocide,' they are also harming their own cause by claiming that since the Holocaust is 'unique,' no other human tragedy is comparable to it, thus precluding anyone else from being sympathetic to Holocaust victims. It is in the Jewish interest to describe the Holocaust as a universal calamity with which other people can identify. Even though all genocides have similarities, there are obvious differences in timing, scale and location. However, the similarities between genocides far exceed their differences. No one should have a monopoly on claims of human suffering.

These Rabbis do not seem to know that according to the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, besides outright mass murder, genocide also includes "deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part." This is exactly what Azerbaijan is doing -- causing the starvation of 120,000 Artsakh Armenians by depriving them of food, medicines and other basic necessities.

The denialist Rabbis claimed that the terms 'ghetto,' 'genocide,' and 'holocaust' are "inappropriate to be part of the jargon used in any kind of political disagreement." The starvation of Artsakh Armenians cannot be described as a 'political disagreement,' but genocide, according to the UN and Luis Moreno Ocampo, former Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

Continuing the series of errors and misjudgments the Rabbis made in their pro-Azerbaijan propaganda letter, they demanded that Armenia's leaders "explicitly and unequivocally clarify that the Armenian people recognizes and honors the terrible human suffering undergone by the Jewish people" and stop "minimizing and belittling the extent of the Jewish people's suffering to further any political interest through incessantly using phrases associated with the holocaust suffered by the Jewish people."

Rather than lecturing Armenia's leaders about the Holocaust, the Rabbis should have addressed their letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who has denied the Armenian Genocide and has pressured the Knesset to reject a resolution recognizing it. Israel should have been the first country to recognize the Armenian Genocide, not the last.

Furthermore, these Rabbis should have had the moral courage to issue a letter condemning the government of Israel for providing lethal weapons with which Azerbaijan in 2020 killed thousands of Armenian soldiers.

Instead of supporting the genocide denialists in Ankara and Baku, these Rabbis should have known that some of the most prominent backers of the recognition of the Armenian Genocide are Jews: Dr. Israel Charny (Director of Institute of Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem), Prof. Yair Auron (historian, author of several books on the Armenian Genocide), Raphael Lemkin (who coined the term genocide), Amb. Henry Morgenthau, Elie Wiesel (Nobel Laureate and Holocaust survivor), Yossi Beilin (Israel's Minister of Justice), and Yossi Sarid (Israel's Minister of Education).

After Pres. Joe Biden recognized the Armenian Genocide on April 24, 2021, both the ADL (Anti-Defamation League) and the AJC (American Jewish Committee) supported Biden's recognition. The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., also issued a statement on April 27, 2021, welcoming Pres. Biden's determination that genocide was committed against the Armenian people. Furthermore, the World Jewish Congress also acknowledged the Armenian Genocide.

In addition, 126 Holocaust scholars issued a joint statement on March 7, 2000, "affirming the incontestable fact of the Armenian Genocide." Among them were professors Yehuda Bauer, Stephen Feinstein, Irving Horowitz, and Steven Katz.

These Rabbis did not condemn former Deputy Prime Minister of Azerbaijan and former Baku Mayor Hajibala Abutalybov, who stated during a 2005 meeting with a municipal delegation in Bavaria, Germany: "Our goal is the complete elimination of Armenians. You, Nazis, already eliminated the Jews in the 1930s and 40s, right? You should be able to understand us." This was reported in the 'Realny Azerbaijan' publication on February 17, 2006.

Since these Rabbis feel that they are entitled to the exclusive use of the term genocide, have they ever sent a single letter of complaint to their dear brother Aliyev for his repeated references to the fake 'Khojalu Genocide?' Isn't this a shameful example of double-standard?

The Rabbis should have remembered Hitler's infamous words uttered on August 22, 1939: "Who, after all, speaks today of the annihilation of the Armenians?" Noticing that the world ignored the Armenian Genocide, Hitler was emboldened to commit the Holocaust.

Yaron Weiss of Jerusalem, a grandson of Holocaust survivors, wrote: "I condemn the cynical self-appropriation of the memory of the Holocaust victims by that group of Rabbis." Yaron also reminded the Rabbis that "Azerbaijan refuses to condemn and apologize for the acts of mass murder committed during the Holocaust by the soldiers of the Azeri Legion."

These Rabbis themselves have belittled the Holocaust by writing it with a lower-case h, instead of capital H.

I urge these Rabbis to apologize for their revisionist and insulting letter, a smear-campaign instigated by Azerbaijan, as a result of which, they have lost their sense of decency and morality. Should their letter embolden Azerbaijan to commit more atrocities against Armenia and Artsakh, these Rabbis will be considered partners in the Azeri crimes.

https://youtu.be/moByGLA7FDc?si=z8w3V-E3_PIZug7w

24 September 2023

Righteous Jews Urge Pro-Azeri Rabbis To Cancel Planned Conference in Baku

Shortly after I wrote a column two weeks ago condemning European pro-Azerbaijan Rabbis for planning to hold their conference in Baku, I was pleasantly surprised to receive an email from 18 mostly Jewish prominent individuals, including eight righteous Rabbis, who condemned the trip to Azerbaijan and called for its cancellation.

In a letter addressed to the Chief Rabbi Sir Ephraim Mirvis of the UK, the 18 signatories wrote: "We earnestly seek to initiate dialogue with you to appeal the decision of the Conference of European Rabbis and ensure that this conference does not go ahead in a country that is so opposed to the core values of Judaism and the teachings of the Torah." The letter quoted Prof. James Russell of Harvard University who recently wrote: "It takes bullets to kill people, but indifference pulls the trigger."

The letter described "the grave humanitarian catastrophe unfolding in Artsakh" caused by Azerbaijan's blockade of the Lachin Corridor, the only route linking Artsakh to Armenia, thus risking the starvation of 120,000 Artsakh Armenians. The letter stated that Azerbaijan is a country "widely recognized for having one of the lowest rankings in the world for upholding political rights and civil liberties."

This group of righteous Jews wrote: "We are saddened that this prominent organization that represents so many Jewish people across Europe is, by choosing to host their conference in Baku, supporting the Azeri government rather than standing up for human rights and living and breathing the lesson of the Shoah -- 'never again'. While we acknowledge and appreciate the freedom that Jews can enjoy in Azerbaijan, the fact that these same inalienable rights do not extend to other minorities and religions in the country give us cause to worry about how long Jews will be able to enjoy freedom in what is otherwise a totalitarian government in the Muslim world…. Despite numerous international appeals and the decision of the International Court of Justice, the authorities of Azerbaijan have callously ignored calls to lift the blockade, disregarding the agreement signed in November 2020 by Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Russia regarding unimpeded traffic through the Lachin Corridor."

The letter was signed by: Tamar Fyne, Seda Ambartsumian, Josh Kirk, Benjamin Nahum, Rabbi Avidan Freedman (Director of Yanshoof), Prof. Israel Charny, Dr. Oded Steinberg, Rabbi David Rosen, James R. Russell (Mashtots Professor of Armenian Studies, Emeritus, Harvard University), Scott Jason, Lernik Jason, Michael Stone, Rabbi Yehoshua Engelman, Rabbi Tyson Herberger (Associate Professor of Religion and Religious Education, University of South-Eastern Norway), Rabbi Shimon Brand, Rabbi Irving 'Yitz' Greenberg, Rabbi Chaim Seidler Feller and Rabbi Alana Suskin."

In a separate statement issued jointly by Israel W. Charny and Rabbi Avidan Freedman was titled: "This Kosher certificate for Azerbaijan stinks." They explained that the 50 European Rabbis, who had written to the leaders of Armenia complaining about Armenians using of the term genocide, "are being used by Azerbaijan to prove the government's Kosher bonafides to the world, and to shut the world's ears to the cries of the afflicted."

Charny, the director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide in Jerusalem, and Freedman, a Jerusalem-based educator and Orthodox rabbi, stated: We "say in the clearest terms possible that in our eyes, this rabbinic letter misrepresents the facts, misunderstands the fundamental moral significance of the Holocaust, and misses a major pillar of Jewish ethics."

Charny and Freedman then enlightened the pro-Azeri Rabbis about the true meaning of the terms Holocaust and genocide: "In the Encyclopedia of Genocide, the word 'holocaust' was used to refer to the Armenian Holocaust in 1909, and even earlier in other contexts, and the word 'genocide' was coined in 1942 by a Polish Jewish lawyer, Raphael Lemkin, to describe the crime that had been committed against the Armenian people by Turkey, and that was then being committed by Germany against the Jews. The entry on the topic in the encyclopedia ends with the following conclusion: "the word (holocaust) belongs historically to all people's suffering, and certainly that it not become a basis for excluding the suffering of any other people."

Charny and Freedman described the pro-Azeri Rabbis "claim that any contemporary comparison of the suffering of people is a desecration of the holy memory of the Holocaust, and a belittling of the Jewish people's suffering is itself an absurd desecration of Holocaust memory."

Charny and Freedman explained that "What the European Rabbis letter does is to cynically weaponize the memory of the Holocaust in order to enable the infliction of mass suffering. After all, these rabbis do not deny that 120,000 residents of Artsakh are in danger of starvation because of the blockade imposed by Azerbaijan. They do not deny that Azerbaijan is using mass starvation as a tactic for political gain. But by silencing Armenian criticism of Azerbaijan's actions, they are the ones who cynically use the 'Holocaust card' for political purposes."

Charny and Freedman concluded their statement: "The decision of these rabbis to raise their voices on the side of the oppressor is a desecration of Holocaust memory and of Jewish values. In the spirit of this season of repentance, we call on the Conference of European rabbis, or at the very least, on individual rabbinic members of conscience, to have the moral courage to remember their rabbinic duty, and retract their decision."

Comments



Arsho Zakarian – 2023-10-03 13:15:19
Well written and researched. Who are behind these rabbis? Whose horn are they blowing. The Israeli government's, whose sales of arms to Azerbaijan is more than 30%. Or is it the supply of petroleum? These so called religious people have sold their souls to the Azeri forces who will mock them at a convenient opportunity. Let's see who will laugh at the very end. Jewish intellectuals and scholars do not share the sickly views of these ignorant and malicious rabbis. Thanks Harut Sassounian and thank you Keghart.