WHY DON'T JEWS CONDEMN ANTI-SEMITISM IN TURKEY?

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By Harut Sassounian, Publisher, The California Courier, 30 July 2009

Rifat Bali, a Jewish scholar and a native of Istanbul, has been investigating anti-Semitism in Turkey for many years. He has authored several books and articles on the history of Turkish Jews. His most recent book, "The Jews of Turkey and the Armenian Genocide," is a monumental work that documents how the Turkish government pressured not only Turkish Jews, but also the Israeli government and American-Jewish organizations, to lobby against congressional resolutions on the Armenian Genocide.

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Turkey's blackmail of Jews in and out of Turkey is not news to our readers. Neither is the fact that there has been widespread anti-Semitism in Turkey for decades, if not centuries. In a lengthy article published in July by the Institute for Global Jewish Affairs in Jerusalem, Mr. Bali meticulously documents the fact that such racist attitudes are held by practically the entire spectrum of Turkish society.

In his article, "Present-day Anti-Semitism in Turkey," Mr. Bali summarizes his analysis in four key points:

- "Turkish intellectuals have always taken a pro-Palestinian and anti-Israeli stance. Islamists associate the 'Palestine question' with alleged Jewish involvement in the rise of Turkish secularism. Leftists see Israel as an imperialist state and an extension of American hegemony in the Middle East. Comparable themes are found among nationalist intellectuals.
- "Turkish reactions to Israel's 2006 war in Lebanon and 2009 war in Gaza often spilled over into anti-Semitism. Newspaper columnists, some of them academics, belonging to the various ideological streams helped fan popular sentiment against Israel and Jews. Israel was said to be exploiting Holocaust guilt and the services of the 'American Jewish lobby' to further its own nefarious aims.
- "Turkish approaches to the 'Palestine question' rarely venture outside the clichés of Turkish

popular culture. Turkish publishing houses providing translated works on the issue are careful not to run afoul of popular sentiment. The net result is that both Turkish columnists and their readers utilize only limited sources on the conflict that are preponderantly anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic.

- "Any attempt by the Turkish Jewish leadership to confront Turkish society on combating anti-Semitism is likely to backfire and even further exacerbate the problem. Given this reality, the only options left for Turkey's Jewish community are to either continue living in Turkey amid widespread anti-Semitism or to emigrate."

Mr. Bali documents his assertions by quoting from dozens of anti-Semitic statements published in various Turkish newspapers in recent years. Here are some examples:
-- Toktamış Ateş, professor of political science at Istanbul and Istanbul Bilgi universities, newspaper columnist, and a prominent intellectual who frequently appears on TV, described Jews as "the first and most racist people in history." (Bugün, July 20, 2006).

-- Ayhan Demir, a commentator for the Islamist Millî Gazete, wrote: "The first thing to be done to achieve the security of Istanbul and Jerusalem is to get rid of, in as short a time as possible, this 'shanty town' that has begun to harm humanity on the entire face of the earth, and which is as offensive to the heart as to the eye. To send the occupiers to the garbage heap of history, together with their bloody charlatanism would be one of the most noble acts that could be realized in the name of humanity. A world without Israel would be, without a doubt, a much more peaceful and secure world." (Millî Gazete, December 30, 2008).

-- Nuh Gönültaş, a well-known columnist, said Hitler was justified in his treatment of the Jews, since "the state of Israel is an even greater tyrant than Hitler." (Bugün, August 1, 2006).

-- The Islamist sociologist Ali Bulaç, a well-known columnist for Zaman, described Gaza as "a concentration camp that in reality surpasses the Nazi camps." (Zaman, December 29, 2008).

It is simply astonishing that Israeli officials and Jewish leaders worldwide hardly ever react, at least not publicly, to such widespread and vicious anti-Semitic outbursts in Turkey. Why is Rifat Bali resigned to the fact that "the only options left for Turkey's Jewish community are to either continue living in Turkey amid widespread anti-Semitism or to emigrate?" This is a fundamental question that Jews themselves should answer!

By keeping quiet, Jewish leaders are simply encouraging Turkish commentators to continue making racist and insulting remarks. If Israel's President Shimon Peres and ADL's National Director Abraham Foxman were not so busy denying the Armenian Genocide, they would perhaps spend more of their time fighting anti-Semitism!

Related Material:

Present-Day Anti-Semitism in Turkey by Rıfat N. Bali
The Jews of Turkey and the Armenian Genocide by Ayse Gunaysu

Other articles of Harut Sassounian (Partial list)

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