

„If I were not a Jew, my hair would stand on end with fear“

Remarks, delivered at the second Inter-Parliamentary Conference on Combating Antisemitism in Ottawa/Canada on November 8, 2010.

by Matthias Küntzel

“If I were *not* a Jew”, wrote Hannah Arendt, the Jewish philosopher, in 1942, “but belonged to any other people, my hair would stand on end with fear if only a single hair on a Jew’s head were to be touched.” Why is it that today the non-Jew’s hair does not stand on end with fear while global antisemitism increases?

For Jews and the state of Israel, antisemitism is a matter of to be or not to be. Jews who took up arms during the Holocaust did not fight a war but a struggle for life. The newly founded Jewish state, when it took up arms in 1948 to resist the attack of Arab armies was not waging a traditional war but a struggle for Jewish survival. The same is true when Israel defends herself against Hezbollah and Hamas, two well armed movements dedicated to killing Jews.

Fanny Englard epitomizes Israel’s longing for peace. This 85 year old lady grew up in Germany/Cologne and lives now south of Tel Aviv. She lost nearly her whole family – three brothers, the mother, the father, the grand-parents and uncles and aunts - during the Shoah. She experienced the Holocaust as well and survived the camps by sheer luck. In 1947 she went to Israel and founded a new family to replace the murdered one.

Today, she is not willing to sacrifice her new family to the very same antisemitic hatred which had already killed her first family. As a citizen of Israel she is a proud Jew and confident that the Jewish state will protect its citizens with every available means if necessary – not in order to conduct war, but to save Jewish life.

But what about the non-Jews (or Gentiles) like myself? As a rule, they still prefer to point the finger at Israel and the Jews which is a comfortable position since “whoever points the finger is the plaintiff, and whoever stands in the dock is the defendant”, as American scholar Ruth Wisse put it. (Ruth R. Wisse, *The Anti-Semite’s Pointed Finger*, Commentary, November 2010). Yet, Hannah Arendt was right since antisemitism does not stop with the killing of Jews. But how can we convince Gentiles to leave their comfortable position and show solidarity with the attacked? Two suggestions:

First, we have to convince our fellow citizens that antisemitism destroys not just human beings but freedom and social development as well.

Antisemitism contradicts freedom, as the Iranian case shows. Ahmadinejad’s regime has to suppress the media and the people because it is an antisemitic regime and cannot stand the truth.

Antisemitism contradicts social development as the Arab regimes show. While they are pointing their fingers to Israel they are unable to tackle the misery of their own people.

Antisemitism contradicts academic integrity as many campuses in the West display. Scholarship is corrupted by politics as long as an anti-Israel bias dictates the discourse.

Antisemitism contradicts international security as we have seen in the past and as we see today. Because of the antisemitic incitement and policies of the Iranian regime, war is looming.

Second: We have to patiently explain why there is antisemitism which does not mention the word “Jew”. Let us take the example of Iran.

Ahmadinejad’s call to eliminate Israel has “little to do” with anti-Semitism, suggests Baham Nirumand, the most influential Iranian exile in Germany. “In Iran,” Nirumand continues, “there would no basis for this, since Iranian Jews have lived here for 2000 years with persons of other faiths. Even in the Islamic state they are fully accepted as a community of faith and represented

in the parliament by elected representatives. Up to now, Ahmadinejad has never criticized Jews as such, but above all the ‘Zionist occupation power,’ Israel”. (*tageszeitung*, June 23, 2006)

Though religious minorities are not fully accepted as communities of faith, Nirumand is mainly correct: There are about 20.000 Jews living in Iran, Ahmadinejad has embraced anti-Zionist Jews in Tehran and used to limit his attacks to the “Zionists”. Iran is certainly the most antisemitic regime of the world, but this does not go without saying. We can and we have to deliver proof.

Proof no 1: Ahmadinejad invests the word “Zionist” with exactly the same sense as that with which Hitler once invested the word “Jew”: namely, that of being the incarnation of all evil.

He says, “Two thousand Zionists want to rule the world.” He says, “The Zionists” have for sixty years now blackmailed “all western governments.” “The Zionists have been dominating an important portion of the financial and monetary centers as well as the political decision-making centers of some European countries and the United States”. “The Zionists” fabricated the Danish Muhammad cartoons. “The Zionists” are responsible for the destruction of the dome of the Golden Mosque in Iraq as well as the destruction of the Twin Towers in Manhattan.

But - whoever makes Jews responsible for all the ills of the world – whether as “Judases” or “Zionists” – is clearly driven by anti-Semitism of a genocidal nature.

Proof no 2: Genocidal antisemitism means that you want to kill Jews in order to redeem the world. A Nazi party directive of May 1943 provides an example. It prophesied: “This war will end with antisemitic world revolution and with the extermination of Jewry throughout the world, both of which are the precondition for an enduring peace.” Ahmadinejad, in his speeches, has revived this kind of genocidal utopia. Thus, he promised to the audience at the Holocaust deniers’ conference in 2006 in Teheran: “The Zionist regime will be wiped out, and humanity will be liberated.” “If peace prevails in the

world”, he added in another speech, “the people of the world will eradicate Zionism.”

Proof no 3: Holocaust denial constitutes the peak of antisemitic incitement: Whoever denies the Holocaust kills the victims a second time. To destroy the memory of the victims completes the work of their extermination. Whoever declares Auschwitz to be a “myth” implicitly portrays the Jews as the enemy of humankind, who for filthy lucre has been duping the rest of humanity for the past sixty years.

Whoever talks of the “so-called” Holocaust suggests that over ninety percent of the world’s media and university professorships are controlled by Jews and thereby cut off from the “real” truth.

In this way, precisely that sort of genocidal hatred gets incited that helped prepare the way for the Shoah. Every denial of the Holocaust thus tacitly contains an appeal to repeat it. Genocidal antisemitism and the denial of the Holocaust have nothing to do with Israel’s behavior and cannot be excused by any event in the Middle East.

Though global antisemitism is increasing to an alarming extend it is not politically invulnerable. The opposite is true. However, as Canadian Prime Minister Stephan Harper told us today: “We must speak clearly” and instigate political, diplomatic, moral and intellectual countermeasures on every front.

“If I were *not* a Jew”, to vary Hannah Arendt’s words, “but belonged to any other people, my hair should stand on end with fear when the sole Jewish state is threatened with destruction.” Indeed!