

Distorting the first and preventing a second Holocaust?

Troubling invitations spark controversies about the Global Forum in Jerusalem, to be held end of May 2013

by Dr. Clemens Heni

The Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism is a very important international conference. The first one was held in 2007, followed by two more events in 2008 and 2009. May 28-30, 2013, the fourth Global Forum will take place in Jerusalem. Fighting antisemitism, hatred of Israel, Islamism, anti-Zionism, and the distortion of the Shoah are tremendously timely and important topics.

Israel is a tiny country and the only one facing genocidal threats. Anti-Zionism is a religion in Europe and particularly in the Arab world, and parts of the Muslim world. Iran denies the Holocaust and agitates in a Nazi-style against Israel. Islamism is a huge threat on a worldwide level, but particularly in the Middle East, just look at Egypt and the Muslim Brotherhood, Turkey with the more veiled but influential, equally legal form of Islamism and Jihad (remember the Mavi Marmara) or Saudi-Arabia with its decades long spread of Islamist ideology via funding of extremist groups, mosques, cultural centers and the like. Qatar is home of one of the world's leading Sunni Islamists, Yusuf al-

Qaradawi, who urges the Muslim world to fight Israel, who supports suicide bombing by unveiled females and who thanked Hitler for having punished the Jews. No one is criticizing or isolating Qatar for being host of that influential antisemite and his world-wide media network, including al-Jazeera.

Therefore, the Global Forum will be a very important gathering of those dedicated to fight Islamism, Muslim antisemitism, anti-Zionism and hatred of Israel in all its forms.

However, is it a good idea to invite someone to an event dedicated to fight antisemitism and a possible 'second Holocaust' who is known for distorting, veiling or even affirming the Holocaust? Are politicians or representatives of countries known for their efforts to whitewash their own pro-Nazi legacy allies in the fight against Holocaust denial and distortion of history? Is it a reflection and sign of a change in public relations to invite the very same country to the very same event four years later, again?

Some tiny and not powerful countries have learnt to pay lip-service to Israel while promoting the above mentioned Holocaust distortion in their own countries. This is the case in Hungary and Lithuania.

In December 2009 I was part of a struggle against Lithuanian antisemitism at the Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism, organized by the Israeli Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem. In a working group, Professor of Yiddish Dovid Katz and I, supported by British MP John Mann, criticized Lithuanian antisemitism and Holocaust distortion!

Now, in May 2013, the very same Lithuanian government will be invited to the fourth Global Forum. Are the representatives at the MfA just lazy and have no other countries in mind when it comes to Israel and antisemitism? Was our criticism in December 2009 completely useless?

Now, facing the next Global Forum end of May 2013 in

Jerusalem, Efraim Zuroff, the director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Israel office, said senior government officials from Lithuania, Greece, Hungary and Ireland should not be allowed to attend – and speak at – the Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism. “The opportunity to address the conference by visiting dignitaries should be a prize given to people who are leading the fight against anti-Semitism, and not to individuals representing countries in which the problem is among the worst in Europe, if not *the* worst,”.

In December 2009 Zuroff already criticized the invitation of the then Lithuanian Foreign Minister:

“I am referring primarily to the invitation to Lithuanian Foreign Minister Vygaudas Usackas to participate as a special guest of the forum, but also to the presence there of two right-wing Hungarian politicians, Zsolt Semjen and Zoltan Balog, both of whom have made very negative comments about Hungarian Jews.”

Isn't it predictable and also shocking, that these two countries, Lithuania and Hungary, are again supposed to deliver ridiculous speeches at the very same Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism? They will of course not deal with the failures of their own countries since 2009. They will not apologize for a reburial of a Nazi puppet minister in 2012 in Lithuania (with military honors). Nor will they change their radical nationalist policies, including antisemitism in both countries like the equation of red and brown (“Prague Declaration”) or the toleration if not support of antisemitic and far-right parties like Jobbik in Hungary. The same holds for Greece. Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn was supported by Prime Minister Samaras and a member of that antisemitic party was elected by the Greek Parliament to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). A Hungarian extreme right politician from Jobbik was elected to that very EU body, too. In March 2013 antisemitic and anti-Roma, racist journalist Ferenc Szaniszlo was awarded a state sponsored and

most important Hungarian award for journalists, the Táncsics prize, given under the auspices of Minister of "human resources."

Why should Israel honor such countries and governments at an event exclusively dedicated to the fight of antisemitism?

Nevertheless, computer expert and NGO activist Andre Oboler from Australia rejects Zuroff's criticism and recently attacked the leading Nazi-hunter, historian and activist from the Simon Wiesenthal Center on his JPost blog for his criticism of this year's Global Forum.

In addition, Oboler is the author of a brochure about antisemitism on Facebook. Of course it is important to deal with antisemitism, neo-Nazis, Holocaust denial and related issues on the leading social network. However, Oboler bases his text on British scholar, very influential book author and activist Richard Dawkins. Dawkins insists that there is no free-will, everything is determined, biologically and/or culturally. For example, Dawkins created the term "Meme," which in layman's speak is a means for ideas to be transmitted via 'cultural' genes from one generation to the next.

If one takes this idea one step further the notion of free will can no longer exist in such a Dawkinsian world. One can only wonder what Dawkins would say about the Lithuanian Activist Front (LAF) and their active and self chosen involvement in the killing of Jews during the Shoah. Dawkins has sparked controversies about his aggressive new atheism, too and his friendship with animal rights activist Peter Singer, who endorses euthanasia, and says that a handicapped baby could be seen as a "non-person" and be killed, is highly troubling. Dawkins has talked about the (in his view: huge and dangerous) Jewish influence in American foreign policy, for example, and has agitated against Judaism.

The Global Forum for Combating Antisemitism, organized by the

Israeli Foreign Ministry, and probably the biggest gathering of scholars, activists, politicians, philanthropists, citizens, bloggers, journalists and others in the pro-Israel and anti-antisemitism tent, should be a place to analyze and fight all forms of antisemitism.

Inviting countries who are known for their contribution to the distortion of history, for the antisemitic rewriting of the history of the Second World War, Nazi Germany and the Shoah, was a bad idea in 2009 and is a bad idea in 2013.

Of course Israeli diplomats are happy if a European or Western colleague is rather friendly and not outspokenly hostile to the Jewish state. However, we have to think twice. We cannot criticize one form of antisemitism (like anti-Zionism or Muslim antisemitism) while endorsing another form of antisemitism like Holocaust distortion, the equation of red and brown, the trivialization of the Holocaust and the promotion of the swastika as "cultural heritage" as is the case in Lithuania. No one who trivializes the Shoah can be considered a true friend of Israel and the Jews, regardless of his or her lip-service to the Jewish state.

Does the steering committee of the Global Forum, including Oboler, and the Israeli government really think that countries who distort the Shoah are among the best allies to prevent a 'second Holocaust?'