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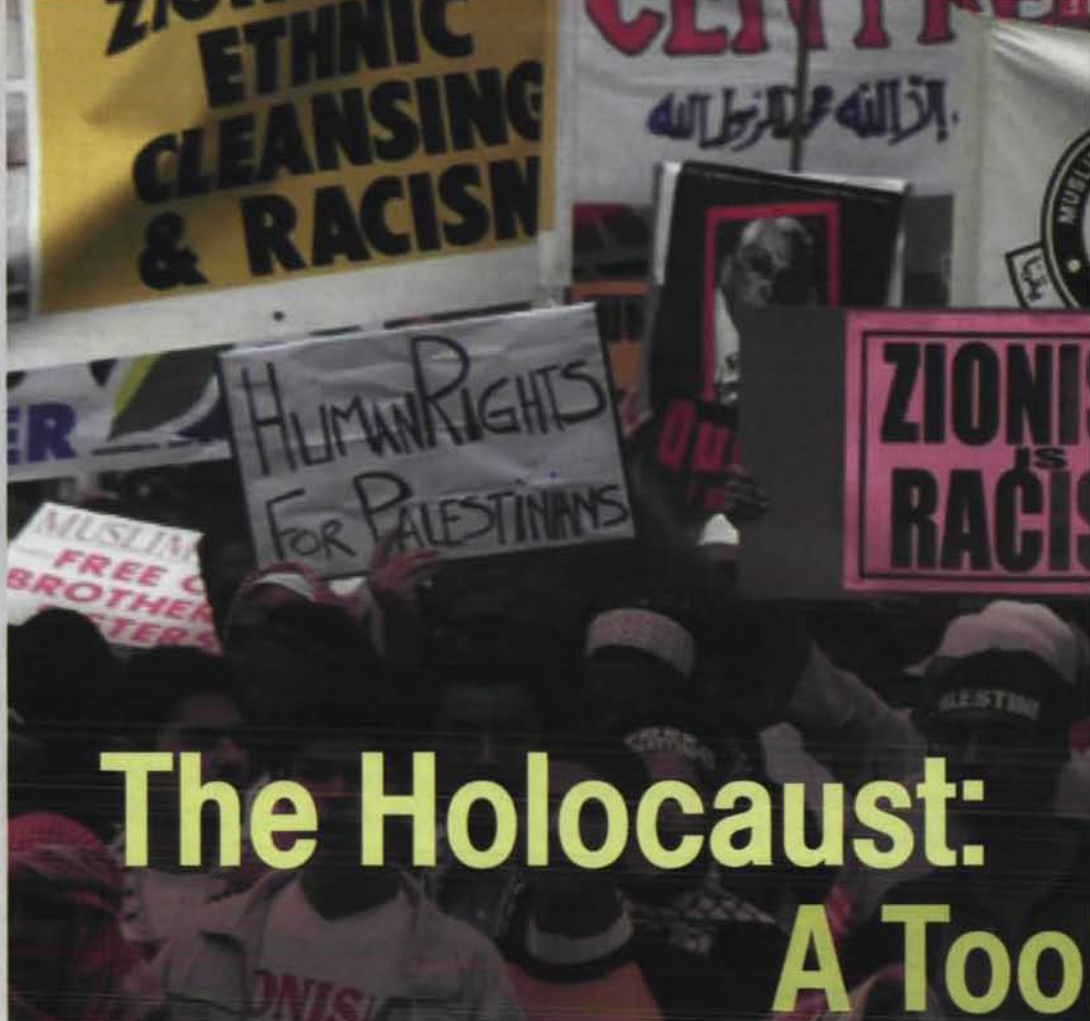
The end of the year 2001 has seen the Middle East peace process in a state of collapse, the US recovering from devastating terrorist assaults, and the world economy battling recession. Humanity has been beaten and battered—held captive, once again, to immeasurable upset and unrest. In the shadow of these recent calamities, where does the Holocaust—humankind's greatest aberration—fit in?

This very question is probed in the opening article of the winter edition of *Yad Vashem Jerusalem* through interviews with four leading Holocaust and antisemitism specialists. While the opening article cites some of the more alarming ways in which the Holocaust is currently being misused, "The Legacy of Holocaust Survivors: An International Conference" touches upon positive applications of the Holocaust, through survivors' educational initiatives and humanitarian lessons.

Extracting the positive from the depth of despair is a theme revisited throughout this edition. The story of life from behind the barbed wires is recounted in "Humor and Melody: Cabaret at the Westerbork Transit Camp" and the ingenuity and strength of extermination camp inmates is recalled in "Escape Under Fire: The Sobibor Uprising."

As we enter the new year, we must mourn our past losses, yet never shut out the possibility of hope and the enigmatic, all-powerful resolve for life.

Cover: Page from *Humor and Melody* album containing photographs and illustrations from the Westerbork cabaret (see article, pages 10-11).



# The Holocaust: A Tool

by Kobi Rivlin

Since September 2000, the Middle East has been plagued by a resurgence of violence (*Intifada*), mirrored by deadly fundamentalist extremism played out on the world stage. Simultaneously, the Jewish people have been encountering a new wave of antisemitism and anti-Zionist rhetoric, unmatched—according to certain authorities—since the dawn of the Holocaust.

In September 2001, the United Nations held the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa. Texts likening Zionism to racism and equating the Israeli treatment of the Palestinians with the German genocide of six million Jews during the Holocaust were drafted and almost incorporated into the conference's final declaration of nations. Following the 11 September terrorist attacks in the US, widespread



Rabbi Michael Melchior

rumors surfaced throughout the Arab world insisting the violence was part of "a world-wide Jewish conspiracy." Anti-Israel sentiments were also expressed in the Western world with assertions that the US had been targeted because of its continuous support for Israel.

Concurrent with these recent events, the subject of the Holocaust—which has peaked in public interest in the past decade—has emerged for the most part as a platform for anti-racist objectives, but occasionally as a tool to further political aims.

**"Today we are encountering the mask of a 'new antisemitism'—a combination of classic antisemitism and that of Bin Laden and fundamentalist Islam," says Israel's Deputy Foreign Minister of Affairs, Rabbi Michael Melchior.**

*Yad Vashem Jerusalem* discussed today's key trends in relation to the Holocaust and antisemitism with four leading specialists: Deputy



# for Newfound Antisemitism?

Minister of Foreign Affairs for the State of Israel, Rabbi Michael Melchior; Director of the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism at Tel-Aviv University, Professor Dina Porat; Academic Advisor at Yad Vashem's International Institute for Holocaust Research, Professor Israel Gutman; and Chairman of the Yad Vashem Directorate, Avner Shalev.

For several decades, the memory of the Holocaust was used as grounds to aid and protect the State of Israel as well as Jews worldwide. Recently, the term *Holocaust* has expanded to include multiple contexts, among them those that condemn the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

According to Porat, "the meaning and status of the Holocaust have changed in the last decade not so much for the Jewish people [and Israel], but for other countries and peoples. Today, the Holocaust serves mainly as a cultural code of education, democracy against fascism, protection of human rights, and an ultimate symbol of suffering.

"In Durban the Holocaust was blatantly used as such a symbol when various state representatives stressed that the conference declaration should not indicate 'do not forget the *Holocaust*,' but rather 'do not forget all *holocausts*...' This phenomenon was also apparent in how demands

for compensation for slavery were based on the model of Holocaust survivor claims. The centrality of the Holocaust today as part of the greater world culture creates a reality in which anyone can use the Holocaust for his own interests—be they educational, political, democratic goals, or even unfortunately, anti-Israeli propaganda."



Professor Israel Gutman

Gutman detects an explicit danger in applying Holocaust terminology to unrelated contexts: "[These recent applications] are attempts to view the Holocaust as one of many events that occurred over many generations, rather than a unique phenomenon of antisemitism and persecution against Jews. People are trying to exploit events like the Israeli/Arab conflict and manipulate the historical facts. We must remember, though, that the Holocaust was civilization's betrayal of the Jews. Something like this had never happened to any other nation, at least not without a direct conflict triggering it."

It was not the phrasing of the term *Holocaust* nor the issue of compensation, but rather the anti-Zionist, anti-Israel street demonstrations in Durban that drew media attention. Demonstrators distributed T-shirts and flyers with antisemitic messages and held signs with slogans such as: "Zionism = Racism" and "Israel the Apartheid State."

According to Melchior: "In Durban any remaining delineation between Jews, Israelis, and Zionists vanished... [The antisemites] believe we are all made of the same flesh, and they want to injure us all. One hundred and sixty-three countries were represented at Durban. They all attacked Israel alone, instead of dealing with the critical issues around which the conference was meant to be based."

Gutman views these occurrences as a warning sign: "A renewed antisemitic campaign has been launched in which there is an attempt to attach a global character and dimension. The preparations for the Durban conference as well as the hushed whispers and blatant propaganda regarding the 11 September disaster were attempts to revive the barbaric cruelty evidenced during the peaks of antisemitism and apply it to human dilemmas which require human solutions."

In Shalev's opinion: "There is not a shadow

of doubt that these rumors and expressions are based on the same basic antisemitic views and legends outlined in *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*... In the 1990s, the [instigating] parties wanted to divert the historical discussion in Holocaust research to marginal factors, thus escaping the most fundamental causal element of the Holocaust—antisemitism.”

Porat also believes that antisemitism is at the foundation of the rumors and incitement against Israel: “We at the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism at Tel Aviv University, do not see a renewal in the Jewish conspiracy theory. Indeed, it has been alive and active for many years. Currently, other than Holocaust denial, the conspiracy theory is the main tool used for antisemitism. It is constantly present, however alters its form, as evidenced most recently with these [anti-Israel] rumors... The Durban conference participants’ willingness to condemn Israel alone, derived largely from antisemitic foundations, but was also precipitated by oil, political, and economic interests.”



Professor Dina Porat

Even when considering these political/economic interests, many were surprised by European representatives and NGOs support of anti-Zionist and antisemitic ideas.

Attempting to explain these unforeseen reactions Shalev comments: “Following many years of suppression, silence, and denial in various European countries, the Holocaust was finally confronted in recent times. This confrontation resulted in many opposing feelings. One reaction in Europe was to view it as part of a healthy process of coping with the past, while adopting modern, democratic values. In Western Europe, though, this process was accompanied by right-wing radicalism, an increase in antisemitism, and a new wave—seeping beneath the surface—that tried to allay the guilt of the murderers, collaborators, and others who stood idly by during the Holocaust.

“This new wave has resulted in extreme criticism and unbalanced media coverage of Israel, as well as the empowerment of traditional antisemitic forces. Of course, Arab fundamentalist propaganda has also aided this new wave in two main ways: Holocaust denial and the use of Holocaust terminology against Israel. Antisemitism was mainly an illness of Christian

society. Now, due to the Israeli-Arab conflict, it plagues parts of Islamic society too.”

Gutman supports this view: “The murder of the European Jews was not an act of one Hitler, but was possible only in a Europe seized by anti-Jewish ideas. It could not have been executed without those enthused by the spirit of Nazism and without the people’s silent acceptance and—to a certain extent—will.”



Arner Shalev

“In every generation antisemitism wears a different mask so as to hide its ugly face. Today we are encountering the mask of a ‘new antisemitism,’ which is a combination of classic antisemitism and that of Bin Laden and fundamentalist Islam,” says Melchior.

This being the case, what can be done today to combat this ‘new antisemitism?’ Should it be confronted in new, innovative ways or should the current educational and public relations apparatuses continue to be used?

**“We do not need to emerge from the recent events feeling the whole world is against us; this is unproductive and erroneous,” states Dina Porat, Director of the Stephen Roth Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism and Racism.**

Porat believes “we do not need to emerge from the recent events feeling the whole world is against us; this is unproductive and erroneous. There have also been some very positive events lately, such as the Pope’s visit to Israel, the Stockholm Conference, Irving’s loss in the libel case [marking a victory over Holocaust deniers],

and the final declaration of nations at the Durban conference [omitting all antisemitic, anti-Israel references]. We must, however, increase the number of public relations emissaries and ensure that they directly access the large media networks.

“I believe there is wide support for Israel and a deeper understanding of the Muslim world, especially after 11 September. Educational programs on antisemitism do not need to be expanded in places like Yad Vashem. Such institutions should focus on soliciting support, explaining the State’s position, and presenting a proportionate outlook on the current situation.”

Shalev explains Yad Vashem’s perspective following the recent events: “Yad Vashem continues to strengthen the bodies fighting antisemitism by providing accurate Holocaust materials and current research. In addition, we are preparing educational tools and explanatory activities in conjunction with Israel’s Foreign Ministry of Affairs so as to effectively deal with the recent events.”

Melchior argues that new ways must be found to cope with the situation: “The events that preceded and took place at the Durban conference revealed a new type of antisemitism which requires a new approach. Therefore, we reinstated the activities of the Forum for the Coordination of the Struggle Against Antisemitism which I have the honor of heading... and established a small response team. Also, we set up an international forum of well-known figures who believe the danger of antisemitism is a danger to democratic society as a whole, and are willing to harness themselves to action on the educational, public relations, and legal levels... The antisemites do not rest for a single moment; we cannot afford to either.”

There are various ways of addressing the recent events, whose long-ranging implications are yet to be determined. Perhaps Gutman sums it up most effectively with his suggestion: “I do not know whether it is necessary to ring all the bells right away. Nevertheless, it is important that we identify the sources of the hatred, are aware of the lies, and are alerted to the potential [for evil] that is ensconced in the latest wave of antisemitism.”



Posters displayed at Durban conference