



NEWS REVIEW

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Holocaust Remembrance Day

Irwin Cotler | *The Jerusalem Post* | 27 January

It did not begin in the gas chambers—it began with words

On this United Nations International Holocaust Remembrance Day, words may ease the pain, but they may also dwarf the tragedy. For the Holocaust is uniquely evil in its genocidal singularity, where biology was inescapably destiny, a war against the Jews in which, as Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel put it, "not all victims were Jews, but all Jews were victims."

This year, in the immediate aftermath of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international Magna Carta of human rights born out of the ashes of the Holocaust, and the Genocide Convention—the "Never Again" Convention which has tragically been violated again and again—we should ask ourselves: What have we learned, and what must we do?

Lesson 1—THE IMPORTANCE OF HOLOCAUST REMEMBRANCE

The first lesson is the importance of remembrance itself. For as we remember the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust—first defamed, demonized and dehumanized, as prologue or justification for genocide, then murdered—we have to understand that the mass murder of millions is not a matter of abstract statistics. For unto each person there is a name—unto each person there is an identity. Each person is a universe. As both the Talmud and Koran teach us, whoever saves a single life, it is as if he or she has saved an entire universe—just as whoever has killed a single person, it is as if they have destroyed an entire universe. And so the abiding imperative: that we are each, wherever we are, the guarantors of each other's destiny.

Lesson 2—THE DANGER OF STATE-SANCTIONED INCITEMENT TO HATRED AND GENOCIDE: THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PREVENT IT

The enduring lesson of the Holocaust and the genocides that followed is that they occurred not simply because of the machinery of death, but because of a state-sanctioned ideology of hate. This teaching of contempt, this demonizing of the other—this is where it all begins. As the Canadian Supreme Court recognized, in words echoed by the international criminal tribunals in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, the Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers—it began with words. These, as the courts put it, are the chilling facts of history. These are the catastrophic effects of racism.

Sixty years later, these lessons not only remained unlearned, but the tragedies have been repeated. For we were all bystanders during a growing state-sponsored hate in the Balkans, Rwanda and Darfur that took us down the road to genocide.

At present, we are witnessing yet another state-sanctioned incitement to hate and genocide, whose epicenter is Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's Iran—denying the Nazi Holocaust as it incites to a Middle Eastern one.

This constitutes a direct violation of the overriding prohibition in international law against

the direct and public incitement to genocide, and a clear legal trigger for the international community to intervene in fulfillment of its obligation to prevent genocide, as established in the Genocide Convention.

As one involved as Minister of Justice in Canada in the prosecution of Rwandan incitement, I can state that the aggregate of precursors of incitement in the Iranian case are more threatening than were those in the Rwandan one.

Lesson 3—THE DANGERS OF SILENCE, THE CONSEQUENCES OF INDIFFERENCE: THE DUTY TO PROTECT

Indeed, the genocide of European Jewry succeeded not only because of a culture of hate and an industry of death, but because of crimes of indifference and conspiracies of silence. And we have witnessed an appalling indifference and inaction in our own day which took us down the road to the unthinkable—ethnic cleansing in the Balkans—and down the road to the unspeakable—the preventable genocides in Rwanda and Darfur. No one can say that we did not know. We knew, but we did not act in Rwanda, just as we know and do not act in Darfur, ignoring thereby the lessons of history, betraying the people of Darfur, and mocking the Responsibility to Protect doctrine.

And so, it is our responsibility to break down these walls of indifference, to shatter these conspiracies of silence—to stand up and be counted and not look around to see who else is standing before we make a decision to do so; because in the world in which we live, there are few enough people prepared to stand, let alone be counted. Indifference always means coming down on the side of the victimizer, never on the side of the victim.

Let there be no mistake about it: indifference in the face of evil is acquiescence with evil itself—it is complicity with evil.

Lesson 4—COMBATING MASS ATROCITY AND THE CULTURE OF IMPUNITY: THE RESPONSIBILITY TO BRING WAR CRIMINALS TO JUSTICE

If the last century—symbolized by the Holocaust—was the age of atrocity, it was also the age of impunity. Few of the perpetrators were brought to justice; and so, just as there must be no sanctuary for hate, no refuge for bigotry, there must be no base or sanctuary for these enemies of humankind. In this context, the establishment of the International Criminal Court must be seen as the most dramatic development in international criminal law since Nuremberg. But it requires active support to prevent it from being another opportunity for impunity.

One need look no further than the case of Ahmed Haroun, the Sudanese Minister of the Interior indicted for his direct role in the war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated in Darfur, who was then cynically rewarded for this indictment by being appointed Minister of State for Humanitarian Affairs and made responsible for hearing the human rights complaints from the very victims he had assaulted.

LESSON 5—THE TRAHISON DES CLERCS

Nazism succeeded, not only because of the "bureaucratization of genocide," as Robert Lifton put it, but because of the trahison des clerics—the complicity of the elites: physicians, church leaders, judges, lawyers, engineers, architects, educators and the like. As Elie Wiesel put it: "Cold-blooded murder and culture did not exclude each other. If the Holocaust proved anything, it is that a person can both love poems and kill children."

Those of us to who have been entrusted with the education and training of the elites should ensure that Elie Wiesel is studied in schools of law and not just in classes of literature; and that the double entendre of Nuremberg—of Nuremberg racism as well as the Nuremberg Principles—is as much a part of our learning as it is a part of our legacy.

CONCLUSION

We should reaffirm today that never again will we be indifferent to racism and hate; that never again will we be silent in the face of evil; that never again will we ignore the plight of the vulnerable; that never again will we acquiesce in the face of mass atrocity and impunity. We will speak and we will act against racism, against hate, against anti-Semitism, against

mass atrocity, against injustice—and against the crime whose name we should shudder even to mention: genocide.

May this day be not only an act of remembrance, which it is, but a reminder to act, which it must be.

[The writer is the former Canadian minister of justice and attorney general and is a law professor (on leave) from McGill University. He has written extensively on international human rights law and genocide prevention]

Marching for Hamas

Denis MacEoin | Middle East Forum | 22 January

Hamas is a bully aided by a bigger bully, Iran. And, just as strident and threatening human bullies get away with their aggression so long as no one calls their bluff, so Hamas has been getting away with murder and torture because the UN and many states won't call its two-faced self-portrayal as the victim in the piece. In the struggle to take over Gaza from Fatah, it went on a rampage that killed hundreds of Palestinians. Even during this most recent assault, in early January, it executed Fatah members for violating their house arrest. A few weeks ago, Hamas determined to hurt yet more of its compatriots by introducing Islamic *hudud* punishments to the Strip, from amputations and stonings, to crucifixions and hangings.

Like all bullies, it likes to taunt its victims. It did just that for years after Israel left Gaza, firing rockets every day into towns like Sderot or Netivot. No one who has dismissed these rockets as harmless homemade toys has ever had the guts to spend a few weeks in Sderot, scurrying from shelter to shelter. And, oh yes, it also built up an arsenal (supplied by Iran) of Grad missiles that certainly aren't anybody's toys.

Like all bullies, Hamas likes to make boastful threats. Its 1988 Covenant is replete with them. It threatens to destroy the State of Israel by violence and violence alone. It says it will never accept the work of conferences or peacemakers, and only jihad will solve its problems. Meanwhile, the Palestinians see their lives drained away in a culture that embraces death and martyrdom, their children exposed to a steady diet of military training and preparation for violent death as suicide bombers.

Even if the Palestinians want peace, Hamas won't let them have it, because Hamas knows best, and jihad "is the only solution." Don't believe me, read the Covenant. It likes nothing better than killing Jews, and the bigger bully in Teheran thinks that's a damn fine thing too. No one says a word, because the UN is dominated by the Islamic states, and the Western governments know where the oil comes from, and nobody likes the Jews much anyway. The people calling for the end of Israel while they march on the streets of London and Dublin aren't all Muslims by any means.

There can be no greater indication of this boastfulness than what has happened in recent days. Having taken a heavy battering from Israel, Hamas now proclaims a "great victory," and its supporters dance in the ruined streets of Gaza, drunk on their own demagoguery. For all its bluster, Hamas, like all bullies, is a coward at heart. Watch those films of Hamas gunmen dragging screaming children along with them to act as human shields, watch how they fire from behind the little ones, knowing no Israeli soldier will fire back. And even as they put their own children's lives at risk, they shout to high heaven that the Israelis are Nazis and the Jews are child-killers. This blatant pornography spreads through the Western media, and people never once ask "what does this look like from the other side," because they are addicted to the comforting news that the Yids are baby-killers as they'd always known, that they do poison wells, that no Christian child is safe come Passover. Hamas has become proficient at resurrecting the blood libel, just as its fighters use the Nazi salute, just as their predecessor in the 1930s and '40s, Haj Amin al-Husseini, conferred with Hitler about building death camps in Palestine and raised a division of SS troops in Bosnia to fight for the Reich.

We watch *The Diary of Anne Frank* on television, and some of us attend Holocaust Remembrance Day events, and others pay lip service to Jewish victimhood; we like our Jews emaciated and helpless under the SS boot. But the moment real Jews stand up and

show themselves the stronger for all their deaths, it awakens an atavistic fear, and people recoil from them. Jews in uniform, how unseemly. Jews beating the bully, how unheard of. Jews with their own state, what upstarts.

In my home country of Ireland, we glamorize the great nationalist heroes who rebelled against the bullying forces of imperial Britain in the uprising of Easter Sunday 1916. In France, they venerate the heroes of the Resistance against the occupying forces of Nazi Germany. In Spain, they have not ceased to heap praise on those who fought against the forces of fascist bullies and lost. To stand up against an enemy bent on your destruction is everywhere counted an act of bravery. But not when it comes to Israel. In 1948 and 1967 and 1973 and 2006, Israel fought off overwhelming forces who made no secret of their plans for an imminent massacre of the Jews. But nobody now seems to care, no one lauds the courage the Israelis displayed, and no one praises the extraordinary restraint they showed in victory.

In a bizarre reversal of all their commitment to human rights and the struggle of men and women for independence and self-determination, the European Left has chosen again and again to side with the bullies and to condemn a small nation struggling to survive in a hostile neighbourhood. It is all self-contradictory: The Left supports gay rights, yet attacks the only country in the Middle East where gay rights are enshrined in law. Hamas makes death the punishment for being gay, but "we are all Hamas now." Iran hangs gays, but it is praised as an agent of anti-imperialism, and allowed to get on with its job of stoning women and executing dissidents and members of religious minorities. If UK Premier Gordon Brown swore to wipe France from the face of the earth, he would become a pariah among nations. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad threatens to do that to Israel and is invited to speak to the UN General Assembly

Israel guarantees civil liberties to all its citizens, Jew or Arab alike, but it is dubbed "an apartheid state"; Hamas, ever the bully, kills its opponents and denies the rest the most basic rights, but we march on behalf of Hamas. The Left prefers the bully because the bully represents a finger in the face of the establishment? Almost no one on the Left has any understanding of militant Islam. Their politics is a politics of gesture, where wearing a keffiyeh is cool but understanding its symbolism is too much effort even for intellectuals.

I have personally had enough of it all. The whining double standards, the blatant lies, the way their leaders have forced Palestinians to suffer for 60 years because peace and compromise aren't in their vocabulary and because they won't settle for anything but total victory. Painful as it was, in the 1920s Ireland created a republic by compromising on the status of the North. Ireland subsequently became a prosperous country and, in due course, one of the hottest economies in the world. When the Israelis left Gaza in 2005, they left state-of-the-art greenhouses to form the basis for a thriving economy. Hamas destroyed them to the last pane of glass. Why? Because they had been Jewish greenhouses.

[The writer is the incoming editor of the leading international journal Middle East Quarterly and the author of a blog entitled 'A Liberal Defence of Israel']

Hypocrisy!

David A. Harris | American Jewish Committee | 26 January

Dear Ms. Trine Lilleng,

You were an unknown Norwegian diplomat till this month.

No longer.

As first secretary in the Norwegian Embassy in Saudi Arabia, you recently sent out an email on your office account in which you declared: "The grandchildren of Holocaust survivors from World War II are doing to the Palestinians exactly what was done to them by Nazi Germany."

Accompanying your text were photos, with an emphasis on children, seeking to juxtapose the Holocaust with the recent Israeli military operation in Gaza.

Clearly, you are miscast in your role as a diplomat, all the more so of a nation that has sought to play a mediating role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

In fact, you're desperately in need of some education.

Let's begin with your current posting. You've been in Riyadh since 2007.

If you're so anguished by human rights violations, perhaps you could have begun by devoting some of your attention - and email blasts - to what surrounds you.

Or were your eyes diplomatically shut?

Have you failed to notice the many legal executions, including beheadings, going on in your assigned country?

Have you ignored the often abysmal treatment of foreign workers, many from Asia, who also happen to be disproportionately counted among the victims of Saudi capital punishment?

Have you neglected the gender apartheid that surrounds you? Did you ever look out of your car to notice that Saudi women are proscribed from driving, and that's hardly the worst of it?

Have you checked the skyline of Riyadh or Jeddah lately to count the number of church spires or other non-Muslim houses of worship?

Have you bothered to inquire about the fate of homosexuals?

Okay, you were AWOL on those issues. Maybe you just didn't want to offend your hosts by speaking the truth, or maybe you're suffering from that diplomatic disease known as "localitis" or "clientitis."

But surely a woman like you, with such capacity for empathy for those in far-away places, and especially for children in danger, couldn't remain silent about other human rights transgressions, could she?

After all, could an individual so deeply moved by the plight of Palestinians in Gaza remain silent about what a *New York Times* columnist earlier this month described as "hell on earth" - Zimbabwe? Could a person so anguished by the fate of Palestinian children stay mum about a country where a girl's life expectancy at birth is 34, much less than half that of her Norwegian counterpart, and where the health care sector has vaporized, all thanks to the one-man rule of Robert Mugabe?

Could such a dedicated humanist possibly avert her eyes from the deadliest conflict since the Second World War, which has killed over five million people, many of them children, in the Congo in the past decade - not to mention the documented and widespread use of torture, rape, and arbitrary detention?

An observer of such acute sensitivity could hardly hold her tongue while Afghan girls attempting to go to school have been doused with acid by those who wish to deny young women access to education, reminiscent of the five years of Taliban rule, could she?

In neighboring Pakistan, where you served in the Norwegian embassy for three years, the beleaguered human rights community must have been fortunate to have such an impassioned voice for all that's wrong in this failing state. Or was that voice, perhaps, on mute?

The children of Sderot, the Israeli town near the Gaza border, have been in desperate need of just such a spokesperson as you for the past eight years.

After all, their town has been in the crosshairs of literally thousands of missiles and mortars fired from Gaza. Those Israeli children live with all the signs of trauma, knowing that, with only 15 seconds warning, they could be hit at any time in their schools, their parks, or their beds. Yet, during my visit there last week, for some reason, those children and their parents had yet to hear you speak out for them. What a pity!

And the children of Iran could use your help as well. According to human rights groups, Iran has no compunction about executing children or those who were children when their crimes were allegedly committed.

Oh, and by the way, your compassionate help would also undoubtedly be welcomed by others under the gun in Iran, including women's rights activists, union organizers, student protesters, independent journalists, reformist politicians, and religious minorities. And let's not forget, once again, the children of Israel, who, according to the Iranian president, don't have a right to live.

But wait! A Google search about you reveals nothing, not a single word, regarding your views on Zimbabwe, Congo, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sderot, or Iran. Or, for that matter, Burma, Darfur, Syria. Shall I go on?

Only Israel, faced with those who wish to destroy it, manages to prompt your impassioned correspondence and righteous indignation. Why?

No less, your stunning lack of education extends beyond the contemporary world to 20th century history, specifically the Holocaust.

Your invocation of the Holocaust to describe what's taken place in Gaza is, frankly, nothing short of obscene.

Your claim that the grandchildren of the survivors are doing to the Palestinians exactly what was done to them goes beyond any norm of decency, much less honesty.

Approve or disapprove of the Israeli military operation, but there is no basis whatsoever for such a comparison.

When Israel entered Gaza in a war of self-defense in 1967, the population was 360,000. After Israel withdrew totally from Gaza in 2005, it was estimated at 1.4 million.

Would that the Jewish population under Nazi rule had quadrupled!

When Israel entered Gaza in 1967, life expectancy for women was 46. When it left Gaza, it was 73.

Shall we even bother to discuss life expectancy for Jews under Nazi occupation?

The Second World War in Europe lasted from September 1, 1939 to May 8, 1945 - 68 months in all. That means an average monthly extermination rate of nearly 90,000 Jews.

Compare that to the total number of victims in Gaza over three weeks - roughly guesstimated at more or less 1,000 - and recall that the majority were armed fighters committed to Israel's destruction, who used civilians, including children, as human shields, mosques as arms depots, and hospitals as sanctuaries.

Believe me, Ms. Lilleng, if the "grandchildren of the Holocaust survivors" had wanted to do exactly what the Nazis did to their grandparents, they would have unleashed their full air, land, and sea power. They would have thrown the Israel Defense Forces' ethical guidelines to the wind, kicked out the UN and Red Cross personnel on the ground, stopped humanitarian transports of food, fuel, and medicine, prevented media reporting, and left absolutely nothing - and no one - standing.

Unless, of course, they needed slave labor, in which case they would have carted off the able-bodied to work in Auschwitz replicas until they dropped. Or material for ghoulish medical experimentation, in which case, in the spirit of Mengele, they would have kept Palestinian twins alive temporarily.

But Israel didn't do any of these things. It's a peace-seeking democracy dedicated to the rule of law - unlike so many of the countries whose horrific sins you blithely choose to overlook.

What are we to make of your selective moral outrage and rank hypocrisy?

You ought to take a look in the mirror and ask yourself why Israel, and only Israel, makes your blood boil and leads you to speak out, even at the risk of grossly distorting both reality

and history.

The answer, Ms. Lilleng, should be painfully obvious.

Pope expresses solidarity with Jews

Rachel Donadio | The New York Times | 29 January

Pope Benedict XVI addressed for the first time Wednesday the uproar over his decision to rehabilitate a Holocaust-denying bishop, expressing solidarity with Jews and strongly condemning Holocaust denial.

In his weekly audience with the public on Wednesday, Benedict said he “renewed with love” his “full and indisputable solidarity” with Jews, whom he called “our brothers of the first covenant.” He added that he had repeatedly visited Auschwitz, the location of the “brutal massacre of millions of Jews, innocent victims of blind racial and religious hatred” and said that the Holocaust “should be for everyone a warning against forgetting, denying or diminishing its significance.”

But tensions remained, a day after Israel’s highest religious body sent a letter to the Vatican asking to postpone an annual bilateral meeting and voicing “sorrow and pain” at the pope’s decision to welcome the bishop back into the fold.

On Saturday, the pope revoked the excommunication of four schismatic bishops from a traditionalist sect, including Richard Williamson, who in an interview broadcast in Sweden last week said he believed that no more than 300,000 Jews perished during World War II, and none of them in gas chambers.

Oded Wiener, the director general of the Chief Rabbinate of Israel, praised the pope’s comments on Wednesday as “a giant step forward” and “an extremely important statement, not only for the Jewish people but also for all the world.”

But on Tuesday, annual Holocaust Remembrance Day, Mr. Wiener had sent a letter to the Vatican saying that unless the bishop issued a public apology and recanted his “deplorable statements,” it would be “very difficult for the Chief Rabbinate of Israel to continue its dialogue with the Vatican as before.” The letter said it would be “wiser” to postpone an annual meeting between the Rabbinate and a small group of Vatican officials, scheduled to be held in Rome in early March.

The Rabbinate’s letter was addressed to Cardinal Walter Kasper, the director of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity and the director of the Commission for Religious Relations with Jews, who said in an earlier interview that he had not been consulted about the pope’s decision to revoke the excommunications of the four bishops.

On Wednesday, the secretary of the commission, Father Norbert Hoffman, said that “no definite decision” had been made about the scheduled meeting. He said Cardinal Kasper had conveyed the message to the highest authorities at the Vatican, and that the pope’s remarks on Wednesday could be seen as a response.

Mr. Wiener said the Rabbinate was awaiting a response from Cardinal Kasper before determining how to proceed with the scheduled meeting.

In a statement on Wednesday, the Vatican spokesman, Rev. Federico Lombardi, said that he hoped that “the difficulties expressed” by the Rabbinate could lead to “further and deeper reflection.” He added that he believed that the pope’s message should be “more than sufficient” in answering concerns about the pope’s and the Vatican’s position on the Holocaust.

In his remarks, the pope added that the Holocaust should teach “new generations” that “only the difficult path of listening and dialogue, love and pardon” can lead to “fraternity and peace in truth.”

The Israeli ambassador to the Vatican, Mordechai Lewy, said he “welcomed” the pope’s remarks about the Holocaust, and called them “instrumental in shaping the parameters of the existing and future relations between Jews and Catholics.” He said the current flap did not affect bilateral relations between Israel and the Vatican, nor did he think they would affect discussions under way for the pope to visit Israel and the Palestinian territories this spring.

Beyond the global controversy, the pope’s overtures to the four bishops raise significant doctrinal questions. The four are members of the traditionalist St. Pius X Society, which was founded in 1970 by French Archbishop Marcel Lefebvre in opposition to the modernizing reforms of the Second Vatican Council. The bishops had been excommunicated by Pope John Paul II in 1988 after Archbishop Lefebvre, who died in 1991, ordained them without Vatican permission.

The society has not said whether it would accept the reforms of Vatican II, and the Vatican has not yet determined the bishops’ future standing within the church. On Tuesday, the society apologized to the pope for the outcry caused by Bishop Williamson’s remarks and said they did not represent its views.

In his message on Wednesday, the pope said he had reached out to the four in an “act of paternal compassion” aimed at relieving their “suffering” for being left out of the church.

He added that he hoped that his gesture would be met “by a commitment on their part to fulfil the further steps necessary to realize full communion with the church,” including “recognizing the majesty and authority of the pope and of the Second Vatican Council.”

Rights activist apologises for anti-Semitic comments

Erik Jensen | The Sydney Morning Herald | 28 January

The convener of a conference on justice for Palestine, to be held at State Parliament tomorrow, has apologised for making anti-Jewish comments despite having earlier defended them as “private conversation”.

Maqsood Alshams, who formed a lobby group called the Asia Pacific Human Rights Institute, organised the conference with three universities to discuss the possibility of Israel being prosecuted by the International Court of Justice.

The Bangladesh-born asylum seeker, who was once nominated for the National Human Rights Award, wrote in private emails obtained by the *Herald* that Israel had overshadowed the Holocaust in its treatment of Palestine and that God hated Jews.

“The simple answer is that you the Jews are real motherf----- bastards,” he wrote in an email to Richard Benkin, a human rights activist based in Chicago.

“You guys are simply assholes ... Stop playing the bloody victim games.”

In another email, to a Sydney management consultant, Anna Berger, Mr Maqsood said Israel’s actions in Gaza were more serious than the Holocaust, comparing the conflict with Hitler’s treatment of Jews.

Asked about the emails, Mr Maqsood initially defended his right to a private argument. “Is it anything wrong to have a private conversation? That is not my public view ... I am not an anti-Semite at all. I have many Jewish friends.”

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But late yesterday Mr Maqsood apologised and withdrew the remarks. "I am ashamed to say they were made at a time when I was intoxicated and angry," he said. "Of course, there is no excuse for such remarks."

The universities participating in Mr Maqsood's conference have refused to withdraw support, despite calls from the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies. "It now seems the conference will also serve an anti-Semitic agenda," the board's chief executive, Vic Alhadeff, said yesterday. "The participating organisations - wittingly or unwittingly - have allowed themselves to be used as part of that racist agenda."

Larissa Behrendt, of the University of Technology, said monetary support would remain for the conference as the forum was part of legitimate debate. "We saw this as being an opportunity for debate [but] there's no space in it for the comments that have been made. There's no excuse for them [but] it doesn't mean the debate we want to have take place should not take place."

Macquarie University and the University of Sydney have also maintained their positions.

The Edmund Rice Centre, a Christian social justice body where the Asia Pacific Human Rights Institute is based, said the remarks were derogatory and offensive.

Anti-Semitic remarks stop Palestine conference

Josephine Tovey | The Sydney Morning Herald | 28 January

A conference on justice for Palestine due to be held tomorrow at State Parliament has been called off after several high-profile speakers withdrew from the event, citing revelations the convener had made anti-Semitic remarks.

Maqsood Alshams, who had organised the conference 'Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere', made a series of derogatory remarks about Jewish people in several private emails, the Herald revealed on Wednesday.

Two of the conference's key speakers, Antony Loewenstein and Peter Manning, withdrew in a joint email to the convener at lunchtime Wednesday. "As a Jew who condemns anti-Semitism I thought it would be inappropriate to engage in a debate in that kind of environment," said Mr Loewenstein, a blogger and author of *My Israel Question*. "That does not change the fact that I still feel very strongly about the situation in Gaza."

Professor Manning, who lectures in Journalism at UTS and is a critic of anti-Arab media bias, also said he felt the conference was no longer an appropriate forum for the issue. "I don't want to confuse the Palestinian issues that I care about with any form of racism or anti-Semitism," said Professor Manning.

Mr Maqsood, a Bangladesh-born asylum seeker and founder of the small lobby group Asia Pacific Human Rights Institute, apologised for the emails on Tuesday and said he had been "intoxicated and angry" when he wrote them. He was not available for comment tonight, but had notified people via email during the afternoon that the event had been cancelled.

The CEO of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies Vic Alhadeff, who condemned Mr Maqsood's comments on Tuesday, said he was vindicated by the decision.

"Our community felt from the outset that if the conference went ahead, it would have been irredeemably tainted with bias, given the lack of balance and the anti-Semitic comments made by the principal organiser," he said in a statement.