

Correction: Iran-Holocaust-Conference

AP Associated Press

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In a Dec. 12 story about an Iranian-sponsored conference on the Holocaust, The Associated Press erroneously attributed a claim that Zionists have exaggerated the number of Jews killed by the Nazis.

Rabbi Yisroel Dovid Weiss, who attended the conference with members of the group Neturei Karta, denied making such a statement. He said the claim, reported by Iran's state news agency and television, does not reflect his group's position. He opposes the state of Israel, and believes Israelis have used the Holocaust to gain sympathy and advantage but doesn't believe the Holocaust toll is exaggerated.

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran's hard-line president said Tuesday that Israel will one day be "wiped out" as the Soviet Union was, drawing applause from participants in a conference casting doubt on the Holocaust.

President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's comments were likely to further fuel the outcry prompted by the two-day gathering, which has gathered some of Europe's and the United States' best-known Holocaust deniers.

Anger over the conference could further isolate Iran as the West considers sanctions in the standoff over Tehran's nuclear program.

But Ahmadinejad appeared to revel in his meeting Tuesday with conference delegates, shaking hands with American participants and sitting near six anti-Israel Jewish participants, dressed in black ultra-Orthodox coats and hats.

"The Zionist regime will be wiped out soon the same way the Soviet Union was, and humanity will achieve freedom," Ahmadinejad said during Tuesday's meeting in his offices, according to the official IRNA news agency.

He called for elections among "Jews, Christians and Muslims so the population of Palestine can select their government and destiny for themselves in a democratic manner."

Ahmadinejad has used anti-Israeli rhetoric and cast doubt on the Holocaust to rally anti-Western supporters at home and abroad, particularly in Asia and the Middle East. Several times he has referred to the Holocaust as a "myth" used to impose the state of Israel on the Arab world.

"The Holocaust is the device used as the pillar of Zionist imperialism, Zionist aggression, Zionist terror and Zionist murder," David Duke, a former Ku Klux Klan leader and former state representative in Louisiana, told The Associated Press.

Ahmadinejad announced the conference would set up a "fact-finding commission" to determine whether the Holocaust happened or not. The commission will "help end a 60-year-old dispute," he said.

The Tehran conference was touted by participants and organizers as an exercise in academic freedom and a chance to openly consider whether 6 million Jews really died in the Holocaust, away from Western taboos and the restrictions imposed on scholars in Europe, where some countries have made it a crime to deny the Nazi genocide during World War II.

It gathered 67 writers and researchers from 30 countries, most of whom argue that either the Holocaust did not happen or that it was vastly exaggerated. Many have been jailed or fined in France, Germany or Austria, where it is illegal to deny the Holocaust.

Participants milled around a model of the Auschwitz concentration camp brought by one speaker, Australian Frederick Toben, who uses the mock-up in lectures contending that the camp was too small to kill mass numbers of Jews. More than 1 million people are estimated to have been killed there.

Rabbi Moshe David Weiss, one of six members attending from the group Jews United Against Zionism, said he opposes the state of Israel, and believes Israelis have used the Holocaust to gain sympathy and advantage; but he doesn't believe the

Holocaust toll is exaggerated. He and his group reject the creation of Israel on the grounds that it violates Jewish religious law, but he said he doesn't believe the Holocaust toll is exaggerated.

"They have used the Holocaust as a device to justify their oppression," he said.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair said Tuesday that the conference was "shocking beyond belief" and "a symbol of sectarianism and hatred."

In Washington, the White House condemned Iran for convening a conference it called "an affront to the entire civilized world."

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