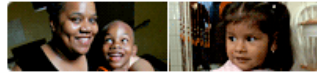


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Holocaust Deniers and Skeptics Gather in Iran

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Rasoul Mousavi, head of the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Institute for Political and International Studies, during the opening of the Holocaust conference at the foreign ministry in Tehran.

By NAZILA FATHI Published: December 11, 2006

TEHRAN, Dec. 11 — Holocaust deniers and skeptics from around the world gathered at a government-sponsored conference here today to discuss their theories about whether six million Jews were indeed killed by the Nazis during World War II and whether gas chambers existed.

In a speech opening the two-day conference, Rasoul Mousavi, head of the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Institute for Political and International Studies, which organized the event, said it was an opportunity for scholars to discuss the subject "away from Western taboos and the restriction imposed on them in Europe."

The foreign ministry had said that 67 foreign researchers from 30 countries were scheduled to take part. Among those speaking today are David Duke, the American white-supremacist politician and former Ku Klux Klan leader, and Georges Thiel, a French writer who has been prosecuted in France over his denials of the Holocaust.

Mr. Duke's remarks late this afternoon are expected to assert that no gas chambers or extermination camps were actually built during the war, on the ground that killing Jews that way would have been much too bothersome and expensive when the Nazis could have used much simpler methods, according to an advance summary of his speech published by the institute.

"Depicting Jews as the overwhelming victims of the Holocaust gave the moral high ground to the Allies as victors of the war, and allowed Jews to establish a state on the occupied land of Palestine," Mr. Duke's paper says, according to the summary.

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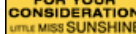
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One of the first scheduled speakers, Robert Faurisson of France, also called the Holocaust a myth created to justify the occupation of Palestine.

The conference is being held at the behest of Iran's president, [Mahmoud Ahmadinejad](#), who likewise called the Holocaust a myth last year, and repeated a well-known slogan from the early days of the 1979 revolution in Iran, "Israel must be wiped off the map." He has spoken several times since then about a need to establish whether the Holocaust actually happened.

Most of the speakers at the conference today praised Mr. Ahmadinejad's comments.

Bendikt Frings, 48, a psychologist from Germany, said he believed Mr. Ahmadinejad was "an honest direct man," and said he had come to the conference to thank him for what he had initiated.

"We are forbidden to have such a conference in Germany," he said. "All my childhood, we waited for something like this."

Toben Feredrick, from Australia, said Mr. Ahmadinejad has opened an issue "which is morally and intellectually crippling the Western society."

"People are imprisoned in Germany for denying the Holocaust," he added.

Mr. Feredrick said he was jailed for six months in 1999 because of his ideas, and that a court in Germany has ordered him arrested if he speaks out publicly again denying that the Holocaust took place.

Other Western "revisionists" presented what they called new facts about the Holocaust at the conference, which also attracted attendees from some ultra-Orthodox Jews belonging to anti-Zionist sects that reject the state of Israel. One participant wearing the traditional long black coat and hat of such groups wore a badge saying: "A Jew, not a Zionist."

It was not entirely clear how the lineup of speakers at the conference was set. The Institute's website had invited scholars and researchers to submit papers in advance for consideration, but revealed little about how they were evaluated. The Iranian foreign ministry also provided little information about participants, saying that it feared they would be prosecuted by their home countries.

The conference included an exhibition today of various photos, posters and other material meant to contradict the accepted version of events, that the Nazis murdered millions of Jews and other "undesirables" in death camps during the war. New captions in Persian on some familiar photos of corpses at the camps argued that they were victims of typhus, not the German state.

Anti-Zionist literature, including a 2004 book by the American author Michael Collins Piper, about Zionist influence in America, was offered for sale to visitors at the conference. So, apparently, was a video recording of 12 Holocaust survivors telling their stories, suggesting that the views represented at the conference may not have been entirely one-sided.

The conference prompted outrage in the West. The German government summoned the Iranian charge d'affaires in Berlin to complain. The French Foreign Minister, Philippe Douste-Blazy, warned that the conference would be strongly condemned if it propagated claims denying the Holocaust.

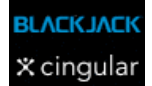
Iran also organized an exhibition last summer of cartoons about the Holocaust, which outraged Jews inside Iran and out.

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Iranian Jewish leaders reacted angrily to Mr. Ahmadinejad’s Holocaust-denying comments last year, issuing a statement saying that his words were spreading fear among Jews in Iran.

“We consider the Holocaust as a fact and a disgrace for humanity,” Haround Yashayai, a leading voice among Iranian Jews, said today. “We cannot say that such a conference cannot be held here. We have condemned similar events in the past, and see no reason to condemn it again.”

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