

Touro Institute Takes on High-Profile Role as U.N. Monitor

On the heels of the U.N. Durban “Anti-Racism” Review Conference held in April 2009 in Geneva, Touro College’s Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust (IHRH) has become an influential U.N.-accredited non-governmental organization that plays an important role in monitoring U.N. activities and encouraging world governments to reject U.N. fora that are platforms for anti-Semitism.

Touro’s IHRH and its director, international law professor Anne Bayefsky, were among the most vocal critics of governments participating in, or considering attending Durban II, which was a follow-up conference to the U.N.’s “Anti-Racism” conference held in Durban, South Africa in 2001. The opening governmental speech at Durban II was delivered by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad who questioned the Holocaust and claimed “Zionism personifies racism.”

The Institute and Prof. Bayefsky played an important role in persuading the U.S. government to boycott Durban II and forgo additional planning meetings ahead of the conference. Prof. Bayefsky was also credited with convincing Germany to stay away from Durban II after she called European countries to task over their planned participation in the conference at an April 17, 2009 preparatory meeting. “Will Germany sit on Hitler’s birthday and listen to the speech of an advocate of genocide against the Jewish people and grant legitimacy to the forum which tolerates his presence?” Prof. Bayefsky asked on behalf of the Institute at a packed televised meeting a day before Germany finally pulled out.

To keep up the pressure and alert the world to the dangers of U.N. platforms like Durban II that promote anti-Semitism, Prof. Bayefsky wrote articles and op-ed pieces in numerous media outlets including the *New York Daily News*, *Forbes.com*, *The Washington Times*, *The Jerusalem Post* and *National Review*. She also posted constant news updates, alerts and videos online.



Professor Anne Bayefsky speaking on the floor of the U.N. in Geneva

Speaking at both the preparatory meetings and the conference itself, Prof. Bayefsky criticized governments and U.N. officials for their support of the conference’s anti-Semitic agenda. “This conference will be remembered not only for the words of the Iranian President, but for the actions of his anti-Semitic supporters among you, his U.N. enablers, and all those states without the courage to reject a forum for bigotry when it masquerades as human rights—however transparent the

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veil,” she said when she took the floor at Durban II last April. “It will be remembered for its cynical reference to the Holocaust while planting the seeds for another genocide against the Jewish people and its nation.”

On behalf of Touro’s IHRH, Prof. Bayefsky also organized a high-profile panel discussion on anti-Semitism at the U.N. in Geneva on *Yom HaShoah*, or Holocaust Remembrance Day, which fell the day after Ahmadinejad’s speech. Speakers on the panel included Nobel Peace Prize

laureate, writer and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel, Academy Award-winning actor and activist Jon Voight, Harvard Law School Professor Alan Dershowitz, Jewish Agency Chairman and human rights activist Natan Sharansky, African-American author and columnist Shelby Steele and French Catholic priest Patrick Desbois, who has devoted his life to confronting anti-Semitism, furthering Catholic-Jewish relations, and locating gravesites in the Ukraine and Belarus where Jews were killed during the Holocaust.

The standing-room only event was attended by about 200 ambassadors, journalists and non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives. “It raised awareness about combating modern forms of anti-Semitism and the nexus between anti-Semitism and the demonization of the state of Israel,” Prof. Bayefsky said, noting that the Institute’s NGO status allowed it to host the panel discussion at the U.N. and speak during the conference itself. “The panel discussion was the only event run on U.N. premises drawing attention to the anti-Semitism and anti-Israel activities in the context of Durban II.”

She said the Durban II panel was one of the Institute’s most important achievements to date. “We were able to bring together six world heroes to educate people and combat modern anti-Semitism, even when it is allowed in the halls of the world’s chief international organization. Under the vision that (late Touro College Founder and President) Dr. (Bernard) Lander set for Touro, we were able to accomplish that goal against considerable

odds. There are many who would prefer that these things not be brought to the world's attention, but we brought together people of such stature that the issue could not be ignored." Since Durban II, the Institute has continued to monitor U.N. events and alert the media, Congress and the public to issues of concern.

The Institute was affiliated with Touro's law school from its founding in 1999 until last year when Dr. Lander decided it should become a Touro-wide institution. In mid-2008, IHRH officially relocated to Touro's New York City campus and began reporting directly to Dr. Anthony Polemeni, vice president of Touro College's Division of Graduate Studies.

Before becoming a U.N. monitor, Prof. Bayefsky worked with the U.N. in various capacities, including authoring a major review of the U.N. human rights legal system in collaboration with the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights that was published in 2001. After working in collaboration with the U.N. for many years, Prof. Bayefsky, who is also the author and editor of 12 books in the field of human rights, felt it was imperative to apply her experience to monitoring the development and "fair application" of international human rights standards throughout the United Nations. Touro's commitment to human rights and the welfare of the Jewish people, as well as its key location in New York City, has helped her do just that.

In addition to the very high-profile work of monitoring the U.N., the IHRH also runs a speaker series. Last year, it hosted the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations Gabriela Shalev and Middle East expert Yossi Olmert—the brother of the former prime minister—as well as a Holocaust survivor and a Rwandan genocide survivor who both spoke at an event about genocide prevention. An event on refugee protection included NGOs operating in the field and an expert from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees.

"The Touro Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust is now well-placed to play an important role in human rights education and advocacy and to contribute to the effort to combat all forms of modern anti-Semitism," Prof. Bayefsky said. ■

For more stories about Touro's IHRH, go to www.touro.edu/tourolinks

Speaking Out Against Anti-Semitism at Touro-Sponsored Durban II Event

High-profile speakers at Touro College's IHRH panel discussion held at the Durban "Anti-Racism" Review Conference in Geneva denounced the conference and Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's speech as anti-Semitic, hateful and extremely damaging to any serious effort to combat racism. Here is what they said:

NOBEL PEACE PRIZE LAUREATE, AUTHOR AND HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR ELIE WIESEL: "Here we are now in the United Nations, an organization created as a response to the atrocities of the Second World War, and we have to protest against an anti-Semitic speech delivered by the head of Iran."

ACADEMY AWARD-WINNING ACTOR AND ACTIVIST JON VOIGHT: "It was a shock to me to hear Ahmadinejad speak yesterday, just as the demonization and the de-legitimization of Israel are shocking to me. There is so much anti-Semitism, including within these confines. So let us pray both for the courage to stand up and fight against this anti-Semitism, and for peace—with the understanding that we must



Jon Voight addresses IHRH panel



Natan Sharansky, Alan Dershowitz, Father Patrick Desbois, Elie Wiesel, Jon Voight, Shelby Steele and Ann Bayefsky (standing) at the IHRH panel in Geneva

not bend to terrorism in any shape or form."

HARVARD LAW SCHOOL PROFESSOR ALAN DERSHOWITZ: "Anti-Semitism thrives on distortion of the historical record of the kind we heard yesterday from Ahmadinejad. The fact that Ahmadinejad was the first and major and most-covered speaker at this conference was an accurate reflection of what this conference is all about."

JEWISH AGENCY CHAIRMAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST NATAN SHARANSKY: "I have a frightening feeling that already the world of my past is coming back. I feel it here when the fight against racism means first and foremost a fight against Israel."

AFRICAN-AMERICAN AUTHOR AND COMMENTATOR SHELBY STEELE: "Anti-Semitism is an expression of bad faith. That is what it always is, an expression of bad faith."

FRENCH CATHOLIC PRIEST FATHER PATRICK DESBOIS: "Anti-Semitism is still very much alive. It's why people of good will must stand and be strong together."