

International Holocaust Remembrance Day Marked In Iran

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Last year there was [a little-noted story](#) that shows yet again that the Iranian people are not unified in their outrage over Soleimani's death, or in hatred of the U.S. and Israel:

In an unexpected display of solidarity with the Jewish community, young Iranians are taking to social media to mark International Holocaust Remembrance Day.

Joining a popular global social media initiative, the young people photograph themselves holding signs with the hashtag #WeRemember in English and Hebrew. Some are also pictured wearing symbols of the Holocaust such as yellow stars and armbands. All of them hide their faces.

According to Israel's Channel 2, the phenomenon first

appeared last week when Sharona Avginsaz, director of digital media for the Israeli Foreign Ministry's Farsi-language service, received a message from an Iranian who had urged his friends to take part in the #WeRemember campaign.

January 27 is International Holocaust Remembrance Day," the Iranian wrote. "People from all over the world take part in it, and also we Iranian citizens want to express our solidarity and friendship with Israel's citizens and Jews all over the world, and share our pictures with this hashtag."

Avginsaz said the youth who wrote the message gathered several of his friends who photographed themselves with the #WeRemember hashtag. The youth even wore an Iranian naval uniform in his picture. He remains in touch with the Foreign Ministry and is studying Hebrew.

The Foreign Ministry has republished the pictures on its Farsi-language Facebook page and said it has received encouraging responses. One user wrote, **"Long live the Iranian people and Israel, until now Israel has done us nothing wrong, and when the Islamic regime falls, my first trip after visiting the tomb of the Persian Shah in Egypt will definitely be the beautiful State of Israel."**

Another wrote, **"Because of the lies of the regime, I did not believe in the past that the Holocaust took place, but today I understand this and imagine the pain that the Jews experienced during the Holocaust."**

"Well done to these young people, you show the world the real Iran," stated a third.

Avginsaz told Channel 2 that the Iranian youths say that "everything the regime says is bad, we understand that it's the opposite; when the regime says Israel is our enemy, we already know it's not true."

Avginsaz said they often add, **"Israel is our friend, it's**

never done anything bad to us, we have no differences with it, and don't even have a shared border. To the contrary, cooperation with Israel in the areas of water, agriculture, and more can help us."

Israel-friendly Iranians, Avginsaz claimed, number in the thousands.

"It's hard for us to understand this," she pointed out, "but when you live in a country like this, which constantly says that Israel and the Jews are bad, it creates an attraction to the forbidden, and many of them want to learn Hebrew, for example."

"They talk about how [former Iranian president Mahmoud] Ahmadinejad tried to deny the Holocaust," she added, and they say, "'We already know that it happened, that six million Jews died in it.' Many exiled Iranians recommend that they come to Poland to visit the death camps, share information, and understand exactly what the regime has tried to prevent them from understanding for decades."

The example of young Iranians on social media offering their solidarity and sympathy on social media as they marked International Holocaust Remembrance Day, apparently the only Muslims in any Muslim country to do so, prompts a few observations. First, it reminds us that just after the attacks on 9/11/2001, while there were pro-forma denunciations of the terrorists by most Muslim governments, and wild celebrations – songs, cheering, distribution of celebratory candy – by the "Palestinians," only in one Muslim-majority country, Iran, were candlelight vigils held in many cities, with hundreds of thousands of participants. More than 60,000 Iranians took part in just one of those vigils, held in Tehran's sports stadium.'

The Islamic Republic of Iran has created precisely the opposite effect on young Iranians from what it intended. Having constantly repeated, over the 40 years of its

existence, that Israel is the Little Satan (America being the Great Satan), Israel is the Enemy, Israel must be destroyed, the regime has managed to produce young people who, convinced that the regime always lies, firmly believe the opposite. When Mahmoud Ahmadinajad again and again denied the Holocaust, that only led many Iranians disaffected with the regime to take a greater interest in what was being denied, and to learn about the Nazi murders, and to sympathize with its victims. Among many of those who have grown to hate the regime, its antisemitism has led not to indifference, but to philosemitism.

Some of these young Iranians have been learning Hebrew, precisely because it has been presented to them as the language of the "enemy." Forbidden fruit. Others say that when the regime falls, and they are free to travel, Israel will be among the very first places they visit. Iranians who have been living in exile for years have recommended on Farsi-language websites that young Iranians "come to Poland to visit the death camps, share information, and understand exactly what the regime has tried to prevent them from understanding for decades."

If – or rather, when – the Islamic Republic finally collapses, one may expect that young Iranians, heartily sick of the Islamic totalitarianism that they have endured since birth, will turn to other faiths. Some will embrace the original, indigenous religion of Persia, Zoroastrianism. Others may find Christianity answers a felt spiritual need. It is even now, despite the mortal danger that apostates from Islam run, the "fastest growing religion" in Iran. Others may now feel it safe to practice the Baha'i religion, for in the Islamic Republic, 202 Baha'is were executed, and thousands imprisoned. Many of those young Iranians will likely take a great interest in their own country's pre-Islamic history, the very history that has been dismissed or ignored during the rule of the ayatollahs. They will want to learn about the most celebrated

Persian kings: Cyrus the Great, who issued an edict giving the Jews the right to return from their Babylonian Captivity to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple, and Darius the Great, under whom the rebuilding of the Temple, which had ceased, was resumed and completed.

Young Iranians will want to see Israel, for themselves, precisely because it has been the object of such incessant official hatred. They've heard so much about it as the Little Satan, from the clerics, for 40 years, so it must – they believe – be doing something right. They will visit Jerusalem, the Western Wall, Yad Vashem, the Israel Museum. Much to the horror of the local Arabs who call themselves "Palestinians," these Iranians, who have been subjected to decades of pro-Palestinian propaganda, will not have much interest in taking the side of these so-called "Palestinians." Instead, their sympathies will remain with the Israelis, whom they have been taught to hate, and precisely because of that. The Iranian people have never liked the Arabs at the best of times, regarding them as uncivilized Bedouin, suffering by comparison to the Persians who created a high civilization. The millions of Iranians who oppose the Islamic Republic are distinctly ungrateful for the Arab "gift" of Islam that has been responsible, many with reason believe, for the misery they have endured for the past forty years.

It's a dream, of course, this foreseeable future for Iranians that I've sketched just above. But it's verisimilar. It could happen. Let us hope.

First published in