

NATIONAL INTEREST

American Muslim Leaders Visit Concentration Camps to Learn About Holocaust, Pay Respects to Victims

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Young Israelis walk under the sign at Auschwitz concentration camp reading "Arbeit Macht Frei," (Work makes you Free).

A group of eight American Muslim leaders have visited the Dachau and Auschwitz concentration camps to learn more about the Holocaust and to pay respects to its victims.

The excursion, which ran from August 8 through August 10, was organized by Marshall Breger, an Orthodox Jew who served as a senior White House official under Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. The trip was co-sponsored by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a German think tank, and

the Center for Interreligious Understanding, a New Jersey-based interfaith dialogue group, the [Jewish Daily Forward](#) reported.

"There is a view that there is growing anti-Semitism in the Muslim world, reinforced by people like [Iranian] President Ahmadinejad, that there is growing Holocaust denial in the Muslim world," Breger, now a law professor at Catholic University, told the Jewish Daily Forward. "In light of that, the idea was to offer education to those who might not have the kind of knowledge that we've had about World War II and the Jewish community, and to do this in a public way."

Among other activities, Muzammil Siddiqi, imam of the Islamic Society of Orange County, Calif., led prayers at the concentration camps, saying: "We pray to God that this will not happen to the Jewish people or to any people anymore."

The delegation's sole female member was Laila Muhammad, daughter of the late U.S. Muslim leader W.D. Muhammad and granddaughter of the late leader of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad.

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Several U.S. government officials also joined the group, including Rashad Hussain, special envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and

Hannah Rosenthal, the State Department's special envoy to monitor and combat anti-Semitism, the Forward reported.

Berger told the paper that the heartfelt comments of the delegates -- some of which have made previous statements that many Jews view as problematic -- show the trip was a valuable experience in promoting education, understanding and maybe even change.

Mohamed Magid, imam and executive director of the Washington area mega-mosque All Dulles Area Muslim Society, is now preparing an article for the Muslim magazine Islamic Horizons on Holocaust denial.

"No Muslim in his right mind, female or male, should deny the Holocaust," Magid, a native of Sudan, told the Forward. "When you walk the walk of the people who have been taken to be gassed, to be killed, how can a person deny physical evidence, something that's beyond doubt?"

Former Holocaust denier Yasir Qadhi, the dean of academics at Al Maghrib Institute in New Haven, Conn., said the trip was eye-opening.

"Anybody who is a Holocaust denier should deserve a free ticket to see Auschwitz and Birkenau," he told the Jewish Daily Forward, "because seeing is just not the same as reading about it."