HOLOCAUST VICTIMS FORGOTTEN

January 25, 2001

ISLAMIC HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

<http://www.ihrc.org.uk/show.php?id=84>

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PRESS RELEASE
For Immediate Release

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UNITED KINGDOM REMEMBERS ONE HOLOCAUST, IGNORES THE REST

The 27th January has been designated Holocaust Memorial Day in commemoration of the tragic genocide against Jews by the Nazis that occurred in the first half of the 20th Century. British Home Secretary, Jack Straw, officially launched the designation of the occasion last year in October during a visit to the Imperial War Museumís holocaust exhibition in London.

First suggested by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, the day itself marks the anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz concentration camp. ìHolocaust Memorial Day will ensure that the horrendous crimes committed against humanity during the second world war are not forgotten by future generationsî, said Jack Straw. Stephen Smith, director of the Bath Shalom Holocaust memorial centre similarly commented: ìThe lessons of the holocaust need to be spelled out again and again for each new generation.î (BBC, 23 October 2000)

Unfortunately, the lessons are not learned well. Chairman of the Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC) Massoud Shadjareh, said: ìThe oft-touted resolution ënever againí has turned out to be a slogan that means little for victims of other atrocious genocides. Despite saying ënever againí, the international community has stood by and watched genocides occur against the people of Rwanda, Cambodia, Bosnia, Iraq, Republic of Chechnya of the Russian Federation, and Palestine, among others. ëNever againí has to be all inclusive.î

The ceremony to be held in central London will focus primarily on the Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust, excluding significant coverage of other victims of the Nazi Holocaust, other genocides and perpetrators. David Sells remarked: ìBy using the Jewish Holocaust as its focus for the Memorial Day, as its emblematic atrocity, the Government is in danger of narrowing the debate on such evils, rather than widening it. Jewish critics fear too that it helps to paint them into history, as Hitler saw them, as pariah.î Although the Government briefly refers in passing to Rwanda and Bosnia as ìmodern genocidesî, other massacres, both historical and contemporary, have been omitted.

Forgotten is the European Holocaust against the Native Americans. There were originally an estimated 80 million Native Americans in Latin America when Columbus landed there, and approximately 12 to 15 million more north of the Rio Grande. By 1650, a total of 95 per cent of the native population of Latin America had been massacred. Michael A. Dorris observes that by the time the continental borders of the United States were established, the entire population had been decimated ìto a low of 210,000 in the 1910 census.î

Forgotten is the Third World Holocaust in which 12 to 15 million people have been violently killed in Third World countries since the second world war, with hundreds of millions more being killed as their economies were destroyed. ìUnknown as it is, and recognizing that this has been standard practice throughout colonialism, that is the record of the Western imperial centres of capital from 1945 to 1990î, observes J. W. Smith, Director of the Institute for Economic Democracy in California.

Forgotten is the Persian Gulf Holocaust in Iraq - the international communityís mass killing of 1-2 million civilians in Iraq under the United Nationsí (UN) brutal economic sanctions regime, which bans all basic necessities for human survival. Former UN Assistant Secretary-General Dennis Halliday is among the many eminent observers who have openly condemned the policy as ìgenocidalî. An internal UN report also indicates that nearly half of all structures targeted by Anglo-American planes over Iraqi ëno-fly-zonesí are civilian structures entirely unrelated to military activity.

Forgotten is the Israeli Holocaust against Palestinians that began in 1948 when three quarters of a million civilians were systematically ethnically cleansed, and hundreds of Arab villages reduced to rubble. This Holocaust has continued unceasingly to this day as 4 million Palestinian refugees live in squalid camps under an increasingly brutal Israeli occupation, their homes demolished by the thousand to make way for expanding Israeli settlements. In the recent crisis alone nearly 400 Palestinian civilians have been killed - 40 per cent of them children under 18, and over 10,000 seriously injured.

ìWhile recent discussion over the inclusion of the Armenian genocide in Holocaust Memorial Day is welcome, the omission of other atrocious Holocausts is immoral and self-defeatingî, said Massoud Shadjareh. ìUnless the suffering and sacrifice of the other non-Jewish victims of global injustice are acknowledged and commemorated on an equal level to the genocide of the Jewish people, that suffering will continue to be ignored. This is what we see, for instance, in the plight of Palestine.