

# Fidel Castro accuses Mahmoud Ahmadinejad of antisemitism

Former Cuban leader criticises Iranian president for denying the Holocaust and calls for end to slander of Jews

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Rory Carroll, Latin America correspondent  
guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 8 September 2010 19:59 BST

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Fidel Castro, a longtime critic of Israeli government policy, said Jews had been slandered for centuries. Photograph: Juan Mabromata/AFP/Getty Images

Fidel Castro has accused Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, of antisemitism, in a passionate defence of Israel's right to exist. Cuba's retired president, a longtime critic of Israeli government policy, said Jews had been slandered and slaughtered for centuries whereas Muslims were not blamed for anything.

The 83-year-old comandante criticised Ahmadinejad for denying the Holocaust and urged Tehran to acknowledge the "unique" history of antisemitism and understand why Israelis feared for their existence.

The comments will sting Iran's president and could prove awkward for Venezuela's Hugo Chávez and Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, two presidents who revere Castro and have forged close ties with Ahmadinejad.

Castro made his comments to Jeffrey Goldberg, a journalist with The Atlantic, whom he summoned to Havana after reading one of his articles about the Middle East.

Goldberg brought Julia Sweig, a Cuba expert at the Council on Foreign Relations, and the two talked with Castro over three days last month. The journalist's blog on the encounters, posted today, revealed the first details of the encounter.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/09/fidel-to-ahmadinejad-stop-slandering-the-jews/62566/>

In recent months Castro has repeatedly warned that the US and Israel were

edging the world towards a nuclear catastrophe in their confrontation with Iran. But he surprised his visitors by dwelling on the historic injustices suffered by Jews. Iran, he said, should understand the Jews were expelled from their land and mistreated all over the world as the ones who killed God. "The Jews have lived an existence that is much harder than ours. There is nothing that compares to the Holocaust."

Castro continued: "I don't think anyone has been slandered more than the Jews. I would say much more than the Muslims. They have been slandered much more than the Muslims because they are blamed and slandered for everything. No one blames the Muslims for anything." Asked what he would tell Ahmadinejad face to face, Castro replied: "I am saying this so you can communicate it." He reminisced about being a young boy and overhearing classmates saying Jews killed Jesus Christ. "I didn't know what a Jew was. I knew of a bird that was called a 'Jew,' and so for me the Jews were those birds. This is how ignorant the entire population was."

The Cuban said nuclear powers, including Israel, should disarm and that he understood Iranian fears of Israeli-American aggression. "Iranians are not going to back down in the face of threats. That's my opinion."

Goldberg said Castro's body was frail but his mind was acute and energy levels high. "And not only that: the late-stage Fidel Castro turns out to possess something of a self-deprecating sense of humour. When I asked him, over lunch, to answer what I've come to think of as the Christopher Hitchens question – has your illness caused you to change your mind about the existence of God? – he answered, 'Sorry, I'm still a dialectical materialist.'"

Goldberg also asked Castro what he now thought about his recommendation to the Soviet Union to bomb the US during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis. "After I've seen what I've seen, and knowing what I know now, it wasn't worth it all."