



Tutu to Haaretz: Arabs paying the price of the Holocaust

By Akiva Eldar
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August 28, 2009 "Haaretz" -- "The lesson that Israel must learn from the Holocaust is that it can never get security through fences, walls and guns," Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu of South Africa told Haaretz Thursday.

Commenting on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's statement in Germany Thursday that the lesson of the Holocaust is that Israel should always defend itself, Tutu noted that "in South Africa, they tried to get security from the barrel of a gun. They never got it. They got security when the human rights of all were recognized and respected."

The Nobel Prize laureate spoke to Haaretz in Jerusalem as the organization The Elders concluded its tour of Israel and the West Bank. He said the West was consumed with guilt and regret toward Israel because of the Holocaust, "as it should be."

"But who pays the penance? The penance is being paid by the Arabs, by the Palestinians. I once met a German ambassador who said Germany is guilty of two wrongs. One was what they did to the Jews. And now the suffering of the Palestinians."

He also slammed Jewish organizations in the United States, saying they intimidate anyone who criticizes the occupation and rush to accuse these critics of anti-Semitism. Tutu recalled how such organizations pressured U.S. universities to cancel his appearances on their campuses.

"That is unfortunate, because my own positions are actually derived from the Torah. You know God created you in God's image. And we have a God who is always biased in favor of the oppressed."

Tutu also commented on the call by Ben-Gurion University professor Neve Gordon to apply selective sanctions on Israel.

"I always say to people that sanctions were important in the South African case for several reasons. We had a sports boycott, and since we are a sports-mad country, it hit ordinary people. It was one of the most psychologically powerful instruments.

"Secondly, it actually did hit the pocket of the South African government. I mean, when we had the arms embargo and the economic boycott."

He said that when F.W. de Klerk became president he telephoned congratulations. "The very first thing he said to me was 'well now will you call off sanctions?' Although they kept saying, oh well, these things don't affect us at all. That was not true.

"And another important reason was that it gave hope to our people that the world cared. You know. That this was a form of identification."

Earlier in the day, Tutu and the rest of the delegation visited the village of Bil'in, where protests against the separation fence, built in part on the village's land, take place every week.

"We used to take our children in Swaziland and had to go through border checkpoints in South Africa and face almost the same conduct, where you're at the mercy of a police officer. They can decide when they're going to process you and they can turn you back for something inconsequential. But on the other hand, we didn't have collective punishment. We didn't have the demolition of homes because of the suspicion that one of the members of the household might or might not be a terrorist."

He said the activists in Bil'in reminded him of Ghandi, who managed to overthrow British rule in India by nonviolent means, and Martin Luther King, Jr., who took up the struggle of a black woman who was too tired to go to the back of a segregated bus.

He stressed his belief that no situation was hopeless, praising the success of the Northern Irish peace process. The process was mediated by Senator George Mitchell, who now serves as the special U.S. envoy to the Middle East.

Asked about the controversy in Petah Tikva, where several elementary schools have refused to receive Ethiopian school children, Tutu said that "I hope that your society will evolve."

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