

Protests over Israeli leader Herzog's presence at Dutch Holocaust Museum

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Amsterdam, March 11 (RHC)-- Israeli President Isaac Herzog has attended the opening of the National Holocaust Museum in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, where his presence prompted protests over Israel's war in Gaza.

The opening took place on Sunday as pro-Palestine demonstrators chanted “Never again is now” and “Ceasefire now” near a square close to the museum.

Thousands of protesters demonstrated against Israel’s war on Gaza, which has killed more than 31,000 people since October, according to Palestinian health authorities. Israel launched the assault after Hamas, the Palestinian armed group that governs Gaza, led an attack on Israel on October 7th, killing at least 1,139 people, according to an Al Jazeera tally based on official Israeli statistics.

Human rights group Amnesty International put up detour signs around the new museum to direct Herzog to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague. In January, South Africa brought a case against Israel at the ICJ over allegations it was committing genocide in Gaza. A final ruling could take years, but the court ordered several provisional directions, including an order for Israel to prevent acts of genocide.

The Holocaust museum showcases the stories of the 102,000 Jews who were deported from the Netherlands and murdered in Nazi camps, as well as their persecution under German World War II occupation. Three-quarters of Dutch Jews were among the six million Jews systematically murdered by the Nazis.

Dutch Jewish anti-Zionist organisation Erev Rave, which organised the demonstrations at the museum’s opening with the Dutch Palestinian community and Socialist International, said that while it is important to honour the memory of Holocaust victims, it cannot stand by while the war in Gaza continues.

“For us Jews, these museums are part of our history, of our past,” said Joana Cavaco, an activist with Erev Rav, addressing the crowd before the museum’s opening ceremony. “How is it possible that such a sacred space is being used to normalise genocide today?”

A pro-Palestinian Dutch organisation, The Rights Forum, called Herzog’s presence “a slap in the face of the Palestinians who can only helplessly watch how Israel murders their loved ones and destroys their land”.

In a statement before the museum’s opening, the Jewish Cultural Quarter that runs the museum said it is “profoundly concerned by the war and the consequences this conflict has had, first and foremost for the citizens of Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.” It added that it is “all the more troubling that the National Holocaust Museum is opening while war continues to rage. It makes our mission all the more urgent.”

The museum told the media that it had invited Herzog before the events of October 7. It said in a statement that it recognised that Herzog’s attendance was controversial, but that he represents the country where Dutch Holocaust survivors migrated to.

Herzog’s remarks that not only armed groups but “an entire nation” was responsible for the October 7th attack and that Israel will fight “until we break their backbone” have been cited by South Africa in its ICJ lawsuit against Israel.

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