

AVI BENLOLO, PRESIDENT AND CEO, FSWC CANADA
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MY BLOG

Introduction

With the increased activities at the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center recently, I have found that my time has become extremely limited. And yet, communicating with many of my friends, supporters and cherished constituents must remain paramount, as it always has.

To this extent, I will attempt to produce a regular blog to inform and advise you about our activities at the Center. The blog will also appear at www.fswc.ca and will be kept short and to the point. At the same time, since my interests are far and wide (for those of you who know my academic underpinnings well), I may hope to include other issues of cause and concern for our constituency as a method of building knowledge.

I was delighted to be invited by the *Ontario Police College* on October 30th to give a presentation and participate on a panel discussion for executive level police practitioners from Ontario. The subject matter for the diverse panel was to discuss the impact of racism and hate on our particular communities while suggesting recommendations to “make Canadian society safer and more secure place for future generations.” During my remarks, I provided the group with an overview of the growth of hate and intolerance in Canada mainly focusing on antisemitism, racism and the threat of terrorism. Some of my key recommendations included: greater sensitivity and understanding of religious and ethnic groups, formulating community partnerships, acquiring knowledge about hate and radical groups and preparedness on how to react, working towards institutional change at all levels and tolerance training for personal and professional growth. In fact, many of the attendees participated in our *Tools for Tolerance program* and attested to its effectiveness.

FSWC had another home run this week at our second annual *Woman of Valour* luncheon (October 31, 2007) held for 400 distinguished women at the Four Seasons Hotel. Chosen to be our 2007 Woman of Valour was *Rosalie Sharp* – a woman who tirelessly leads by example through her philanthropic work, her career as a designer, an author and devotion to her family. She recently published the widely acclaimed book “*Rifke: An Improbable Life*,” linking the past, (represented by the shtetl experience and growing up in Toronto) to her current life.

The *Woman of Valour* luncheon was Co-Chaired by two fabulous community leaders, who are an inspiration in their own right, *Jill Reitman* and *Judy Bronfman*. We thank them for their immeasurable drive and leadership which made the function a smashing success. We also wish to thank the star of Fashion Television, *Jeanne Beker*, for hosting

the event. As well as our Executive Director, *Rabbi Meyer May*, for his tremendous speech.

The “Iranian factor” is on everyone’s mind. We hosted one of the foremost experts on Iran (October 24), *Ilan Berman*, Vice President of the American Policy Institute and author of “Tehran Rising.” A luncheon event was hosted by *Gayle Rubenstein* for the Lawyers Cabinet at Goodmans. An evening event hosted at Oakdale Golf Club by the Business Cabinet and Chaired by *Richard Bradlow, Laurence Goldstein, Daniel Shields, Daniel Wittlin*.

Among many of his insights, *Mr. Berman* believes Iran is some ten months away from acquiring its first nuclear weapon. This has been determined by the large number of centrifuges it is currently spinning. Meanwhile, his most significant concern was that Iran will spawn an arms race that will see some ten countries in the Middle East working to acquire nuclear weapons as deterrence against Iran. Iran, *Berman* believes, is not only a threat to Israel and the US, but also a threat to many neighboring countries, including potentially Russia. The potential threat to Russia may serve to explain, according to *Berman*, the rationale for Russia’s friendship with Iran. One final concern for *Berman* was the transference of Nuclear weapons by Iran to terrorist groups like Hezbollah – in fact, *Berman* points out that Iran has already openly declared this to be its intent. Still, *Berman* advocates finding peaceful solutions like economic sanctions to curb Iran’s ambitions before turning to a military confrontation.

On October 29th, we hosted a private meeting with the assistance of CIC for a round-table discussion with *Avi Dichter*, MK for Public Security. *Dichter*, is one of Israel’s foremost counter terrorism experts. He explained that groups like Hezbollah and Hamas who are normally defined as “terrorists,” are in fact complex organizations which resemble modern armies rather than small armed groups. For *Dichter*, Gaza is a terrorist state living side by side with Israel (in fact, the number of kasam rockets fired at Israel from Gaza on a daily basis is disturbing and lacks any international attention). These groups are now smuggling sophisticated weaponry – as exemplified by many of the advanced Iranian rockets fired at Israel during the war with Hezbollah in 2006. On Iran, *Dichter* believes it is up to the international world body to curb its nuclear ambition.

I was pleased that due to FSWC efforts, Toronto’s Koolhaus recently cancelled a scheduled concert by Croatian singer, *Marko Perkovic*, known as ‘Thompson.’ According to *Leo Adler*, one of the songs he has been singing is *Jasanovic/Stara Gardinska*, this *Thompson* sang live in Croatia in 2005. It venerated those two infamous concentration camps where at least 90,000 Serbs, Jews, Gypsies and anti-fascist Croatians were murdered by the Ustashe movement and its Nazi collaborators during World War II. Although we have provided reasonable evidence, the Croatian Cultural Center has refused our request to cancel his concert in Vancouver. Unfortunately, in Toronto, there are groups secretly working to find a new location for the concert to be held. Special thanks to *Michael Ettedgui* who has been vigilant on this issue.

