



New Nazi hunter continues to press for prosecutions

Wiesenthal successor: 'A big part of our work involves lobbying to create political will'

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When he travels, Efraim Zuroff frequently fills out the "occupation" section of immigration entry forms with the words "Nazi Hunter."

The 57-year-old basketball-loving historian from Brooklyn is the Israel director of the Simon Wiesenthal Center and has officially succeeded its founder as the world's foremost expert in tracking down and helping to prosecute Nazi war criminals.

"The sad fact is a big part of our work involves lobbying to create political will, when the political will doesn't exist," Mr. Zuroff says.

"It is not hard to find these people [war criminals]. What is harder is getting governments to bring them to justice."

In the last 26 years he has worked with the U.S. Office of Special Investigations and the Wiesenthal Center to help identify more than 3,000 suspected Nazi war criminals, many of whom escaped to Western democracies, like Canada, after the Second World War.

But even now, 61 years after the war ended, Mr. Zuroff remains unrelenting in his determination to bring the criminals and collaborators involved in the murder of six million Jews to justice.

Seven years ago, he was instrumental in tracking down, extraditing and successfully prosecuting Dinko Sakic, a Croatian who was the last-known living commander of a Nazi death camp.

"People have this impression that it is over; too much time has passed; the people are elderly, why bother?" he says.

"But we must again and again stress that the passage of time in no way diminishes the guilt of a perpetrator. If you create a totally artificial chronological age at which point you will stop prosecuting, it is basically letting people get away with genocide."

Mr. Wiesenthal, who died last year in Vienna at 96, was a survivor of five Nazi concentration camps and seven prisons, and had 80 family members killed by the Nazis.

An architect by training, he devoted his life to pursuing Nazi war criminals. He played a crucial role in catching Adolf Eichmann, who supervised Hitler's "Final Solution," and leading the hunt for Dr. Josef Mengele, the Nazi Angel of Death at Auschwitz, who died in Brazil.

Mr. Zuroff, the son of an Orthodox rabbi and grandson of one of the founders of New York's Yeshiva University, has no personal link with the Holocaust, other than that he was named for a great-uncle who was murdered with his family in Lithuania during the war. But he holds a doctorate in history in Holocaust Studies and first met Mr. Wiesenthal during a 1978 preview screening of the movie *The Boys from Brazil*, a fictional account of the hunt for Mengele.

Ever since, his life has been devoted to a simple quest for justice.

"Every trial is another landmark and another reminder of the necessity of holding these people accountable, whether it is 10 years or 60 years after the event," he says.

"We are trying to send a very powerful message out there and it is a message to tomorrow's genociders that you may not be caught immediately, but we will be after you and there will be someone who makes it their business to see to it that you pay for this crime."

"I feel very strongly that if more effort had been invested and the nations of the world had been more successful, there would have been a lot fewer potential genociders out there champing at the bit to blow up their ideological enemies," he adds.

In Canada this week to unveil the Wiesenthal Center's annual report on the worldwide investigation and prosecution of Nazi war criminals, Mr. Zuroff said the centre will extend its Operation Last Chance reward program here in an effort to gather information on war criminals in Canada.

Introduced in Eastern Europe four years ago, Operation Last Chance offers rewards of US\$10,000 for information facilitating the conviction and punishment of war criminals.

So far, the program has turned up information on 427 suspected war criminals and led to 87 cases being presented to prosecutors.

In the Baltic states of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, it has garnered leads in 249 new cases.

According to the Wiesenthal Center's annual report, Canada has the second-highest number of continuing war crimes investigations in the world, 265, after Poland, which has 365 cases.

But the centre gives Canada only a C, saying Canadians "have failed to obtain any convictions or indictments during the period under review, but have advanced ongoing cases or opened new investigations."

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