

PETITION IN DEFENCE OF ARCHBISHOP EMERITUS DESMOND TUTU

Tutu's life has been lived in the spirit of "never again" – the ultimate lesson of the Holocaust

Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has publicly criticised Israeli policy towards Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank. He has also criticised Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians. These criticisms are well-known.

Recently, his criticisms of Israeli policy have elicited bitter personal attacks. Amidst calls for him to be removed as Patron of the Cape Town and Johannesburg Holocaust Centres of the South African Holocaust Foundation, Tutu has been attacked and labelled an "anti-Semite" and a "bigot".

Disagreements should be debated openly, but these personal attacks are totally unacceptable.

During the Second World War, which killed 60 million people, Nazi Germany killed socialists, gay men and lesbians, Roma people, and resistance fighters, but its most systematic destruction was of the Jewish people. Six million Jews were transferred to ghettos and concentration camps before being murdered.

This grotesque crime against humanity must never be forgotten. Its legacy and lessons belong to and must be guarded by all of humanity. Racism including anti-Semitism - sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, and inhumanity must be resisted wherever they occur. As stated in the Mission Statement of the South African Holocaust Foundation, we must build "a more caring and just society in which human rights and diversity are respected and valued."

This is precisely the cause to which Tutu has dedicated his life. He represents the finest tradition of resistance to all forms of oppression.

He has taught us that understanding the Holocaust begins with appreciating that the only way for each of us to be safe is for all of us to be safe. He embodies the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document born of the horrors of the Second World War, the rights contained in which pertain equally to Israelis and Palestinians.

To use the Holocaust in an attempt to de-legitimise Tutu is to undermine its legacy and insult the memory of its victims. To call him an anti-Semite, because he has attacked the policies of the Israeli government, is outrageous, renders the term meaningless, and enfeebles the necessary efforts to defeat real anti-Semites and racists.

We give our support to Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu as a most appropriate patron of the South African Holocaust Foundation.