

Wiesel Says Mengele Case Raises Broader Issue Of Who Helped Nazi War Criminals Escape Justice



Howard M. Squadron, left, honorary president of American Jewish Congress, presents organization's "Voice of Conscience" award to author Elie Wiesel for his "eloquence in defense of human rights." Award was presented at New York's Tavern on the Green.

The fate of the death camp doctor Josef Mengele is secondary to the issue of who helped him and other Nazi war criminals escape justice, says author Elie Wiesel.

In his first public comments on the bizarre case, Mr. Wiesel told an American Jewish Congress audience that the Mengele episode has raised a number of broader questions, such as how so many war criminals managed to get help in escaping justice. He called it "shocking" that "so many organizations, official and unofficial, provided the assistance needed."

Mr. Wiesel was presented with AJCongress' "Voice of Conscience" Award, at the organization's annual dinner at New York's Tavern on the Green.

In discussing the escape of large numbers of war criminals, Mr. Wiesel declared that "a network of solidarity" was created, consisting of social and economic groups, and even including church organizations, that helped them get away unpunished. "What an irony, what an injustice that the killers managed to get so much help, when their victims did not," Mr. Wiesel said.

He said he was "ashamed" that intelligence communities in the West and the Soviet Union had sought out Nazi scientists after the war, sheltered them and treated them as untouchable "guests of honor." "How is it possible that all morality disappeared, that conscience vanished in those times?" Mr. Wiesel asked.

Referring to President Reagan's visit last month to the military cemetery at Bitburg where SS members are buried, he said he had received considerable anti-Semitic mail since his celebrated White House remarks urging the President not to go. "I have never received so much hate mail as I have received in recent weeks," he observed. He cited it as a warning that the American Jewish community's rights may be in jeopardy. He also suggested that Jewish concerns are not taken seriously by the Reagan Administration.

But he noted that there is another side to recent events, in that "the tragedy of the Jewish

people is beginning to be examined and heard." The Mengele case has provoked extraordinary interest in the U.S. not because of Mengele as an individual but because it represents deeper issues concerning the Nazi era, he observed.

Mr. Wiesel declared that he does not believe in "collective" guilt. "Only the killers are guilty," he said. "Only their accomplices are guilty. Not their children."

He urged Jews to remain sensitive to "what is happening in our own lifetime," and added, "I believe that as a Jew, if I am sensitive to Jewish tragedy, Jewish concerns, Jewish pain, then I am sensitive to whatever affects human life, human dignity, everywhere, anywhere, to any people."

He praised the American Jewish Congress' record in defending human rights. Of 2,000 organizations dealing with such issues, he said, "very few have the capacity or the fervor or the intelligence or the leadership of the American Jewish Congress to deal with issues legally, humanly, socially, philosophically and Jewishly."

The "Voice of Conscience" Award was presented to Mr. Wiesel by Howard M. Squadron, honorary president of AJCongress. Sidney E. Cohn, honorary chairman of the dinner, also spoke. The dinner was chaired by Rita and Irwin Hochberg, of Great Neck, New York.

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