

By Mary Kluk - Chairman SAJBD

One of the most objectionable recurring themes in the flood of anti-Israel invective provoked by the Gaza conflict was the ready comparisons made between Israel's actions and the crimes of the Nazis. It goes without saying that those resorting to such terminology were not attempting to present a reasoned, fact-based argument; rather, the aim was to demonize Israel as much as possible, depicting it as being so beyond the pale of basic human values as to render impossible any kind of defence on its behalf. Not only does such language seek to bludgeon people into dismissing out of hand any attempt at defending Israel, but results in those who do so being tarred with the Nazi brush and as apologists for genocide.

In its battle to counter this kind of ugly discourse, the SAJBD has time and again appealed to the public not to be swayed by such politically and emotionally charged hyperbole. We have pointed out the inappropriateness of misusing the Holocaust analogy when it comes to Israel, both because it is grossly untrue and because it is deeply hurtful and demeaning to Jewish people.

Comparisons between Israel and the Nazi regime are obscene, not only because they are so grossly defamatory towards the Jewish State but because they belittle the unspeakable crimes of Nazism itself. It is self-evident that casualties resulting from a necessary and unavoidable military operation – casualties that Israel goes to considerable lengths to minimise - cannot be remotely equated with the systematic mass murder of millions solely on account of their being Jewish.

It is not only with regard to Israel that inappropriate Holocaust imagery and terminology has been used. Earlier this year, for example, an animal rights activist was taken to task for likening the treatment of pigs awaiting slaughter to death camp victims. Such sensationalist shock tactics are deeply insensitive, and must be condemned in the strongest terms.

In light of these objections, and the efforts we are making to persuade people to be more sensitive in their choice of language, it is therefore particularly upsetting to see the very same misuse of the Holocaust/Nazi analogy coming from within our own community. I refer here to the article in the SAJR online headed 'Arch no better than Hitler or Stalin'. The offensiveness of the piece itself was compounded by an accompanying image of Tutu with a Hitler-style moustache and Nazi officer's cap. Regardless of what one might think about Archbishop Tutu's attitude and actions towards Israel, attacking him in such terms is puerile and wantonly insulting. It is also, of course, without basis. Does anyone really believe that Tutu is at bottom no better than Hitler and Stalin, two of the worst mass murderers in history? I doubt whether any sensible person would accept that view, and that includes the writer himself, whatever he may have written. What, then, was he hoping to achieve by attacking Tutu in such extreme terms?

It is one thing to take strong issue with someone's views on Israel and if desired to express this in a robust manner. This, however, does not constitute a license to be crudely insulting, nor to make demeaning comparisons that are so obviously exaggerated as to constitute outright falsehoods. Accusing someone of being a Nazi when this is obviously not the case falls into that category, and is wrong, whether it comes from those aiming to wound and insult the Jewish state and Jews in general, or whether it emanates from those wishing to defend Israel against its detractors. It is a misuse of our history, and serves in the end to undermine the work of those who seek to convey the truth of what occurred during the Holocaust and what humanity at large should learn from this.