**Durban II will damage Israel, prof says**

By Dave Gordon

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**TORONTO —** Durban II is a major threat to Israel, York University political science professor Anne Bayefsky says.

The United Nations’ Durban Review Conference, planned for April 2009 as a follow-up to the 2001 UN World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, is expected to be rife with anti-Semitism and anti-Israel sentiment, just like the first one, she told a Sept. 18 audience at Beth Tikvah Synagogue in a lecture titled “The Durban II Nightmare,” one of two talks given at the event.

Bayefsky, who is also the editor of EYEontheUN.org, showed a film she made featuring the anti-Semitic placards and propaganda that were prominent at the first Durban conference.

The film showed many anti-Semitic signs and hundreds of people wearing shirts with the slogans “Zionism is racism,” and “Apartheid Is-real” [sic]. Bayefsky said the proliferation of these messages and their sheer repetition lends credibility to these fallacies and contributes to Israel’s image problem on the international stage.

In addition a string of anti-Israel and anti-Semitic declarations, accompanied by hate-filled protests, hijacked the conference, she said.

“It was a racist anti-racist conference that anti-Semites took full advantage of.”

The same kind of images, rhetoric and propaganda are expected at next year’s forum, to be held in Geneva, she said, adding that they are reminiscent of those propagated in Nazi Germany. “The lessons of the Holocaust have never been learned.”

Iran, Pakistan and Egypt are preparing to draft a declaration branding Israel as racist, she said.

South Africa, Bayefsky said, refused to host the 2009 conference because of the issues that arose in 2001. The American and Israeli representatives walked out at the time, although Canada stayed.

This time, however, the Canadian government, in anticipation of the upcoming conference’s likely bias, declared last January that it would not participate, she said.

Bayefsky, who is also a member of the International Law Association committee on international human rights law and practice, hopes that, with enough advocacy in the coming months, other democratic countries will follow Canada’s lead in boycotting the summit, which she said is expected to host many Holocaust deniers and human rights violators who want to see Israel destroyed.

The United Nations isn’t to be trusted to fight injustice, she added. Six of the emergency sessions in its history were specific to Israel, while not one was called to deal with the Rwanda and Sudanese genocides.

“One-fifth of Israelis are Arabs with more rights than anywhere in the Arab world. Arab states have made their states Judenrein [free of Jews]. Almost nothing Israel does, according to the UN, is perceived as legitimate. The criticism it receives and standards it is expected to hold are applied nowhere else.”

Bayefsky was preceded by Aryeh Green, director of Media Central in Jerusalem, who discussed how the media are influenced when reporting on Israel and how journalists interpret the situation in the Middle East.

Green rebuked Toronto’s Citytv for its Aug. 14 broadcast about clashes at a construction site in the West Bank between pro-Palestinian protesters and Israeli soldiers. The report, by Citytv host Gord Martineau, said that 11 Palestinians were killed. In fact, no deaths occurred, Green said.

HonestReporting Canada called attention to the error, and says the correction offered was terse and insufficient.

Such misinformation coupled with ignorance is a double battle that has to be fought, Green said. “There is a lack of understanding among foreign journalists about Israel.”

Most reporters stationed in the Middle East, he noted, have been parachuted in with little or no knowledge of the history, facts or context of the conflict. “They weren’t told that Palestinian leaders goaded, led and were encouraging violence in September 2000.”

As a result, a new form of information-gathering took shape.

Palestinian media liaisons have welcomed journalists with open arms for 30 years, Green said, befriending them and meeting with them, thus successfully swaying and influencing their reports.

“As a result, so many in the media have adopted a pro-Palestinian slant.” This is important, he said, because “bureaucrats and UN leaders learn from the media.”

Green decided to borrow the idea, and recalled an example of inviting a certain journalist – known to be a harsh critic of Israel – to his backyard barbecue and on a wine tour. That journalist soon afterward became an advocate to help Green call attention to a problematic report on Israel.

“Journalists are given information ad nauseum. We criticize so shrilly [that] it’s often ignored,” he said.

Instead, Green said he takes cues from Dale Carnegie’s book How to Win Friends and Influence People. “First make friends, then you can influence them.”

In the session’s introductory remarks, Amir Gissin, Israel’s consul general in Toronto, spoke of a similar kind of diplomacy on Israel’s behalf.

“The image [of Israel] is problematic in the world,” he said. “It is a burden on our national security. Your influence can make things better. We are all ambassadors to convince others that we are right in what we do.”

The evening’s sponsors were the Speakers Action Group, Canadian Friends of the Hebrew University and Beth Tikvah Synagogue, with co-sponsors One Family Fund Canada, Canadian Jewish Civil Rights Association, International Christian Embassy Jerusalem Canada, HonestReporting Canada and Christians United for Israel – Canada.