

Argentine president accused of anti-semitism

By Kenneth D. MacHarg

Quito, Ecuador--Argentina's president, Carlos Menem has been strongly criticized for allegedly encouraging antisemitism by blaming Jews for the death of Jesus Christ.

Menem was criticized by the Los Angeles based Simon Wiesenthal Center for reading a liturgy on Easter Sunday which repeated "the canard that Jesus was killed by the Jewish people."

Menem participated in an Easter morning service at Argentina's main Christian pilgrimage center, Lujan.

The center acknowledged Menem's "long-standing friendship to the Jewish people," his commitment to Middle East peace and his assistance in helping to track down Nazi war criminals hiding in Argentina.

In a statement, the Center said, "This baseless charge has led to the death, suffering and persecution of Jews the world over and continues to serve as a primary source of antisemitism to this day."

The Center urged Menem, a devout Roman Catholic, to "repudiate the charge of deicide and punish the aides who prepared the material."

Argentina has one of the world's largest Jewish communities. Last year it suffered the worst peacetime attack against Jews when a bomb destroyed a cultural center in Buenos Aires.

Argentina's Jewish community has also expressed its concern about Menem's participation in the service.

Rub,n Beraja, president of the Argentinian-Israelite Association said the use of the texts fosters antisemitism.

"This is a fear that we want to bring to the attention of the ecclesiastical authorities", Beraja said. He said that the practice of blaming the death of Jesus on the Jewish people "does not take into account the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council which recommended that the reading of this passaged be made with clarification which avoid such prejudice tendencies."

The Easter mass was presided over by controversial bishop Emilio Ognenovich who invited the president to read the controversial verse.

"We will denounce whatever trends there are in the church which emphasizes this pre-conciliar attitude and is so distant from a profession of love," Beraja said.

Recently an unidentified Argentinian bishop called Ognenovich an "embarrassment" for his attitude during the Easter mass and his invitation to Menem.

Meanwhile, Rabbi Leon Klenicki of the B'nai B'rith antidefamation league in the United States expressed his concern

about the incident, because, he said, no one had explained the controversial text to President Menem.

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