

CAIR's Screening of "A Mighty Heart" - An Insincere Camouflage

By Ari Bussel

Disorganized Organizers

"In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful" is the start of an e-mail invitation from the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) Greater Los Angeles Area invited to a screening of A Mighty Heart, a movie to be released the following day. A panel discussion to follow.

The e-mail reads: "EVENT ALMOST SOLD OUT - RSVP TODAY!" so I call immediately. Messages were not being accepted since the voice mailbox is full. Later on in the afternoon, the recording changed saying that this is the RSVP line: "Please leave the names of all in your party, and make sure to spell the last names."

Another reporter from our paper called the following day. The event was now sold out. She managed to get hold of the organizers who extended an invitation for her to attend both a reception and the screening.

We arrived half an hour before the reception scheduled time. CAIR seemed to be running the show, right there at the Paramount Studios' gate, and then at every subsequent point throughout the evening. "They are co-organizing the event with the Studios," we are told by a Paramount Vantage publicist. We were not on the list, and neither our press credentials nor our news media placard were of any help. The CAIR representative at the gate explained the event was sold out. After reviewing with me many pages of the RSVP folder, he concluded we cannot come it. He insisted on taking our photo IDs to consult with someone else, but I was adamant that the photos IDs could not leave my sight.

While our names were not found on the list of some 280 others, our fellow reporter's name was finally discovered under her first name. We felt relieved—why ask to spell your last names only to sort the names by the first names, many of which are difficult to spell? Were the names purposely omitted from the roster? CAIR is too organized an organization for having such mistakes happen.

The Movie, A Mighty Heart

We knew we were about to embark on a very interesting journey. Two of us are not movie critics. We came primarily to hear the panel discussion "Building Unity and Understanding in Today's World." The event was co-sponsored by CAIR, Progressive Christians Uniting and Paramount Vantage. Also among the organizers Jews On First and Interfaith Communities United for Justice & Peace (ICUJP). The event was held at the Sherry Lansing Theater, Paramount Studios, 5555 Melrose Avenue, Los Angeles.

We came to an exclusive screening of a movie to which every moviegoer knows the end. Wall Street Journalist Daniel Pearl, an American Jew, was kidnapped in Karachi, Pakistan, and then beheaded by Islamists. This happened five and a half years ago, some five months after the September 11th attacks on the United States. Pearl's chief executioner, Khalid

Sheikh Mohammed, boasted that his pictures holding 38 year old Pearl's head are available on the internet. Beheadings (and other bodily mutilations) are not extraordinary events among Islamists and are often carried out against their own people, not only against non-Muslims (Westerners). Just this past week (June 20th), anyone visiting the website of Hamas' Operational Arm in Gaza would have been treated to a picture of a member who was brutally murdered by Fatah members provided for PR purposes, as part of the Hamas attempt

geous act, it is a make-belief that this is the needed antidote. It is as useful as the internet was for disseminating the pictures of the captured, then-beheaded Pearl.

The real issue, and the needed antidote, lies within the Muslim community itself. Telling Jews and Christians that we need to be more conciliatory, more understanding, less extreme and even more open is an insult to any intelligent person, but it seems to be a very effective tool in CAIR's arsenal.

CAIR, self-designated spokesperson

CAIR wants us to believe that all the terrorist attacks around the world perpetrated by Muslims "in the name of Allah," are carried out by "misguided extremists," "fanatics" and "criminals" that do not represent the true Islam and should not be associated with the Muslim world.

to legitimize its subjugating Fatah in the Gaza Strip.

"A Mighty Heart" is a good action movie but fails to touch one's heart. It seems that I also failed to see the attempt at reconciliation by various people sitting around the dinner table to which the panelists gave so much of their attention. To me the gathering of those who participated in the search to find Pearl was more bringing a closure to a very intense period of time. In my opinion, "Building Unity and Understanding," "Commitment to Global Truth," "Transcending religion, race and nationality," are misleading descriptions of this gathering. I will attempt to describe why.

Whether Pearl was executed because he was Jewish or because he was an American or because he was both, the fact of the matter is that he was brutally murdered by a culture that truly and deeply believes in this act. "All American journalists are CIA agents," we are told in the movie. Characterizing the perpetrators as "extremists," "criminals," "misguided" and other such labels does not address the real issue that they did so from a deep conviction in the right of their way, the true Islam. Daniel Pearl was murdered "In the Name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful." Those who state that Islam prohibits killings of innocent people are either naive or purposely use rhetoric which does not stand to the test of reality.

CAIR should work immediately to eradicate the cancer from within. "Work within your own community," writes Ari Bussel, before trying to persuade Christians and Jews that you are the true representatives of Islam and not those you call "misguided" and "criminals."

Apparently, Pearl was not "innocent" in the eyes of his executioners.

A "Courageous Act" or a PR Stunt?

CAIR-LA president started by declaring a "strong commitment for global truth." I would invite her and her organization to indeed help us all see the truth—and fight against it with all her might and will.

Gathering Jews and Christians together with Muslim moviegoers is not a coura-

geous act, it is a make-belief that this is the needed antidote. It is as useful as the internet was for disseminating the pictures of the captured, then-beheaded Pearl.

for American Muslims (in fact, for more Muslims than one can actually find in the USA), gathers a "Rabbi" (who wears a Yarmulka but goes to movie screenings on Friday night) and a Christian "Pastor" (who claims the Christian right does not represent true Christians and does not speak for the majority of Christians) for an evening about reconciliation, bridge building and unity. The "solution," we were presented, is to foster interfaith relations, to be stupid enough to believe that Pearl's beheading was done by criminals and extremists.

If that were indeed the case, CAIR does not need to persuade Jews and Christians that these madmen act against Islam. CAIR needs to work within its own community to eradicate hatred and falsehoods hundreds of millions of Muslims around the world are taught every minute of every day. All that one needs to do, for instance, is to turn on the Iranian National TV, open a textbook in many Arab countries or listen to the rhetoric from the mosques. These all need to be corrected by those who CARE about our future as a Western Society.

Taking a stand and taking action by CAIR, MPAC and other organizations purporting to represent the Muslim community at large to eradicate the evil from within would be a true courageous act. It would be close to an impossibility, but it will pave the way to a better tomor-

row. When generations are fed by hatred from very early age, when young kids are indoctrinated into "martyrdom" into becoming six year old "freedom" fighters or twelve year old homicide bombers, we have lost the fight to protect their innocence, we have lost the fight to protect the world for the sake of all humanity. When one sees on the news graduating classes of homicide bombers leaving their

training camps to serve Islam by blowing themselves up to inflict as much harm on innocent people in the West, one realizes that CAIR's screening of A Mighty Heart is the wrong medicine to the ills one finds among Islamists.

One can only hope that a day arrives when Muslims try to eradicate the cancer from within and fight against those who believe their own version of Islam (which CAIR calls "criminal" and "extreme"). Such a day is bound to arrive lest there will not a society left on earth. Until such time, CAIR's hosting screenings like A Mighty Heart is not a courageous act at all, it is just another maneuver in its attempt to wrongly gain undeserved legitimacy. "In the Name of Democracy" is Not Always a Valid Reason

Imagine the Ku Klux Klan (KKK, an organization seeking the establishment of White Christian Political Self Determination) has won the elections in California. Or simply imagine the KKK courageously co-sponsoring an interfaith screening of Schindler's List at the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Los Angeles. What is wrong with either one of these scenarios? Neither should be allowed to take place in a society which respects itself. The Muslims seem not to respect themselves, yet demand that we in the West go out of our ways to allow them to continue doing what they are attempting to do: Control the world—using Islam to dominate and then impose Sharia Law over everyone. For instance, when several hundreds Muslim Palestinians used the Church of the Nativity as a refuge, the move was very calculated. The world's wrath was upon Israel, not on the Palestinians which desecrated the place holy for Christianity. Yet, desecrating synagogues in the area that was joined to Gaza when Israel left during its unilateral "Disengagement" is perfectly acceptable. Disrespecting holy places for Christians and Jews is not surprising when apparently there is no prohibition against blowing up mosques in Gaza (done by Muslims against Muslims).

Why should we be surprised? In a tribal, clan society whose roots go back many hundreds of years, punishments which included amputations and beheadings (both still practiced today), stoning women (including those raped), stretching the limbs (by horses or cars) until they are torn away from the rest of the body, lynching and throwing out bodies from a building, torching bodies and leaving the remains for all to see and learn, are all acceptable ways of life.

Thus, calling the perpetrators "extremists" or "radicals," labeling them "non-Muslims acting outside the confines of Islam" begs a second look.

The Antidote must come from within the Muslim community, and inviting Jews and Christians to share in the statement that beheading of an American Jew must pave the road to building bridges must not be allowed. Paramount Vantage should have investigated which organization it allows to "co-sponsor" events on its own lot. Alas, with the publicity this stunt generated, Paramount Vantage clearly benefited. They are, before all, in the business of making money, no matter with whom they go to bed. As Daniel Pearl's wife asks in the movie, as she cuts short an interview: "Have you no decency?"

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Panelists Remarks

Participants: Hussam Ayloush, Executive Director of CAIR-LA, Haim Dov Beliak, Co-founder of Jews On First, Peter Laarman, Executive Director of Progressive Christians Uniting (PCU), moderated by Lisa Smithline, Interfaith Communities United for Justice & Peace (ICUJP).

Supporters: Cafe Intifada; Friends of Pakistan, USA; Los Amigos of OC; MSA

West; Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), Muslim Student Union - UC

Irvine; Pax Christi Los Angeles, and United For Pakistan Independence Day (UFPID).

Dede Gardner, producer of the movie:

I learned from reading the book and the journey making it into a movie an alternative to cynicism. How you think can be a form of activism. Debate, conversation can come from the most unlikely of places, keep you in a role of students and challenge your own assumptions and beliefs.

We live in a most powerful country, the key is to eliminate the roots for violence (economic, social, political). The movie says it best: It is a COLLECTIVE problem.

Hussam Ayloush:

A great piece, amount of pain and tragedy which was real – this is a real person who lost his life. More painful for me as a Muslim. Criminals misuse the name of Islam to justify ... those criminals were not Pakistani, not Muslims, they were criminals.

We need more talk about culture of violence, occupation, torture. Need to change the perception on all sides, what is wrongly described as a conflict of Islam and the West.

Right after this murder, Muslims condemned strongly the murder—it goes against the teaching of Islam.

Learn about others from what they are saying, not from Fox News Channel.

Haim Dov Beliak:

In each of our faiths, we have great responsibility to isolate the voice of fanatics and make sure they do not speak for us.

A certain brand of Islamophobia comes from a lack of knowledge of Jewish history. Need to have a more balanced view of these issues. I want to commend CAIR for the courage it took to organize this evening. It is hard for me to imagine Jews will have a parallel courage. I hope it is the opening for other types of evenings.

Peter Laarman:

Deal with fanaticism from the Christian Right. Looking at Global Misery, "as long as there is misery," ... the need of people to respond in real time ... against further demonization of Muslims, God help us all if we will have another attack [like 9/11]; so our courageous bridge building ...

CAIR cares about every human being. This is exactly what Jews and Christians teach too. Let us try to work with each other, learn about each other, self criticism before we criticize others, we should criticize ourselves. Remember: Violence is a cycle.

Postscript and a Message

"Turning a tragedy into an opportunity" is not the opportunity to be convinced by CAIR and its cohorts that the executioners of Daniel Pearl are criminals, but to take actual steps to uproot this form of Islam from within Muslim society. As long as this form of Islam keeps feeding on the very society it attempts to devour, we fail. Words alone are not sufficient anymore—CAIR's outreach will not be conceived to be genuine until it takes actual steps to fight the cancer from within. Short of this, it actually is a partner and a facilitator, and it will be judged by history as equal in its fault and participation.

The Honorable Syed Ibne Abbas, Consul General of Pakistan in Los Angeles, commented: A very powerful movie. The People and Government of my country strongly condemn this act against humanity. But we live in a dangerous world. Some misguided people misuse the name of Islam. In the Holy Book it says that killing one innocent person is tantamount to killing all of humanity. We are trying to do our best. We did not experience this type of terrorism before the Afghan War. Even today we pay a very heavy price. We lost more than 900 soldiers and over 500 civilians in the last 33 months. These terrorists are killing mindlessly. They do not represent any religion. These are misguided people.

This past weekend, a couple of thousands people protested in Islamabad, Karachi, Lahore, Peshawar and Quetta. It is reported that "in Karachi the crowd chanted 'Death to Rushdie' and carried banners including one reading, 'Awarding Rushdie is starting a fight with Islam.'" Are these, too, misguided people? Is it all a pretense, or are they the true believers? Focus on the Muslim community, wherever it is, before coming to preach to Jews and Christians how peaceful the religion of Islam truly is (when it befits the Islamists).

If society as a whole does not stand up to the evil from within, we are doomed to fail. Yet one must realize that one cannot selectively chose when to take a stand: If killing innocent people is wrong, then we should fight with all our might, will and heart. If we do not condemn such acts and act against them when they are perpetrated against Israelis (whether because they are Jews or because they are Israelis or both), then we should not expect not to pay the very same price. Those who commit these acts against Israel may one day realize the effectiveness of their death cult and turn against their own people. We have seen it most recently in Jordan, a country in peace with Israel. No one condemned homicide

bombings which killed and maimed hundreds of innocent children, adults and the elderly in restaurants, in a club or a pub, celebrating holidays in a hotel, until it was used in a wedding in Jordan. Then, suddenly, Muslims went out to the streets in protest. If killing is prohibited by the Koran, it should equally apply to murdering Jews, to murdering Christians and to murdering Muslims.

CAIR should clarify, for its own sake and for the sake of its Christian and Jewish brethren: Is killing innocent people prohibited by their religion IF AND ONLY IF the innocent happen to be Muslim, or does the prohibition apply equally to murdering in cold blood Christian and Jews?

I am reminded of (Protestant) Pastor Martin Niemoller's poem: First they came for At each stage, he did not speak up, not when the Nazis came for the Communists, nor when they came for the Jews, the trade unionists, the Catholics. When they finally came for him, there was no one left to speak up.

CAIR, MPAC and the representatives of the Muslim community: IF you truly represent the majority of your community (and those elements you call "criminals" from within your own community will disagree that you are the true Muslims), and IF you truly value your Country, the United States of America, and are loyal to it more and before your deep desire for the establishment of a Muslim country right here in America, then:

Speak out, speak loudly and clearly, tell the world that your religion condemns, not condones, hatred and hijacking and homicide bombings. Call and act to free the kidnapped Israeli soldiers. Maybe then we should be sitting in a panel discussion and discuss what else can be done more to save the world (if this is truly your intention). The list is long, and we—the Saturday and Sunday People—are ready for a dialogue. All we need is a true partner.

A new agenda is needed

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When the office of prime minister fell to Olmert, and more so after he was elected to that post, he appeared to be someone who sincerely wanted to bring about a revolution in the country. The convergence plan he devised was not mere lip service, and his call for a change of the national agenda was not a rhetorical trick. Olmert sounded like someone who had concluded that Israel must disengage from most of the territories and focus on dealing with its domestic problems. There was no reason to doubt that he saw his task as leading Israel toward this

change and that he believed he could create a situation in which Israel would indeed be a fun country to live in. The close relationships in Olmert's family, the impact the family members have on each other and the dovish opinions of some of them were circumstantial evidence that his declared direction on the Palestinian issue was no deception.

Then the Second Lebanon War reshuffled the deck. The Qassam fire from Gaza did not help Olmert move ahead with his plan to withdraw from most of the West Bank. For a year he has been almost totally invested in maneuvers to ensure his political survival,

which have nothing to do with the needs of the country. His original positions have been so eroded that he has not hesitated to say that his cabinet does not necessarily need an agenda; day-to-day management is enough. The life span of the "second Olmert government" cannot be known. Ehud Barak says that within a few months, by the final Winograd report, he will press for early elections. Even if the newly elected Labor Party leader does not make good on his promise, Olmert would be mistaken to act as if he has all the time in the world. He must imbue his office with a sense of urgency and redefine his government's agenda.

This change is also essential now because the country needs a good shake-up, because the political circumstances – a government that perceives itself as embarking on a new path – make it possible; because the public longs for it, and because Olmert, who has had a hard time since he took office, might come out the better. Ariel Sharon showed leadership when he suddenly changed the national agenda with the disengagement plan; as a result he profited politically and with the public. This is the model that should guide Olmert when his government turns over a new leaf and begins its term's second year.

Through the Alps, to Palestine

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During the late 1940s, most of the Jews at the Saalfelden camp, which was run by the UN Refugee Relief Agency and the American-Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, were Poles who had fled to the Soviet Union at the outbreak of the war and had stayed there until it ended. When the war was over, the Soviet authorities ordered all Polish citizens who had fled there to return to their country. Most Jews had trouble finding their place again in Poland, and headed further westward, until they reached Saalfelden. Those who wanted to continue to Palestine had to cross the Alps on foot because the British did not let them go legally.

Lili Segal's parents did not talk about what they experienced in Europe for many years. Segal, who works in photography, knew she was born in the town of Merano, Italy. Only 10 years ago did her mother tell her that she gave birth to her there only two days after crossing the Alps on foot, in a trek that lasted

more than 10 hours. The contractions began in the middle of the trek.

Over the last few weeks, Segal has invested many hours in searching for people who were in the camp. One person she found, Wolf Krakowski, was born in Saalfelden in 1946. His parents immigrated to the United States, and Krakowski, who lives in Massachusetts, is a Yiddish rock singer.

When asked why he decided to organize this week's events, Loeschner responds, "When I started getting interested in what happened in Austria during that difficult time, I realized there were a lot of people who, although they saw everything that was happening, decided to look the other way. Meanwhile, there were also people like Liesl Geisler, for example, who came to the aid of the displaced people.

"I decided I couldn't let this chapter in Austria's history be buried – it must be brought to the attention of the young generation. I'm very happy the Salzburg district Education Ministry decided to issue a booklet and a DVD to be distributed to schools, to commemorate the

events here this week."

Loeschner also has enlisted the support of the Saalfelden municipality, which will unveil a memorial plaque at the site of the displaced persons camp tomorrow; the Krimml Local Council leaders, which will unveil a plaque commemorating the efforts of Liesl Geisler in two days; the Austrian National Parks Authority, which has organized the trek across the Alps; and the mayor of Valle Aurina, Italy, which will host a ceremony and concert to close the event.

Loeschner says the educational subjects he hopes to promote are still relevant today. "When I think about what happened here 60 years ago and I look at what is going on around us today," he says, "I can't ignore the great similarity between the distress of the displaced Jews in the 1940s and that of the millions of refugees around the world today. Just like the Jews couldn't return to their homes in Europe, there are also refugees today who can't return home. Most countries then refused to absorb Jews, and most countries today refuse

to absorb refugees from Africa. And then, as now, the media does not show enough interest in this tragedy."

Event participants will be asked to sign an "appeal for peace," formulated by Loeschner. The document calls on "each and every individual to assist all those who may be categorized as displaced persons." The document goes on to "extend this appeal to every politician, to all decision makers around the globe, to ensure that all persecuted persons be granted a new, dignified existence and, above all, not to tolerate the emergence of any circumstances that would force people to take flight."

In the center of Saalfelden, not far from where the large refugee camp stood in the 1940s, stands a smaller building where the UN is housing some 40 refugees from countries including Chechnya, Nigeria, Somalia and Iraq who have found a temporary haven in Austria. Some of these refugees told Loeschner that they intend to come and pay their respects to the Jewish refugees of yesterday.