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Cancellation of conference urged after Israeli barred

By PAUL LUNGEN, Staff Reporter
Friday, 21 May 2010

Canadian doctors are being urged to stay away from a medical conference in Egypt that is proceeding even though an Israeli doctor is being refused entry to the country.

Doctors Against Racism and Anti-Semitism (DARA) is calling on Canadian colleagues to write to the hosting medical organization, the International Society on Thrombosis and Haemostasis (ISTH), urging it to postpone or cancel its 56th Scientific and Standardization Committee (SSC) conference later this month unless Dr. Uri Seligson is permitted to attend. Seligson, a professor of hematology at the Sheba Medical Center of Tel Hashomer Hospital, is chair of the ISTH education committee and two years ago lobbied to permit Cairo to host the event.

DARA vice-chair Rob Zadik said some American doctors have indicated they will boycott the conference because of the refusal of the Egyptian government to permit Seligson to attend.

Zadik is concerned Egypt will similarly prevent other Israeli physicians from participating in the 20th World Congress of the International Association of Surgeons, Gastroenterologists and Oncologists, to be held in Cairo in October.

"This is unacceptable," Zadik said. "This is a country with which Egypt has a treaty. We won't stand for it.

"If this is the behaviour of a country with which Israel has a peace treaty, what is the motivation for Israel to form peace treaties?" he asked.

"This is medicine. There is no room for this kind of behaviour. We won't lay back. We'll do our best to have it cancelled or moved."

As of late last week, there was no indication there would be any changes to the conference. An ISTH spokesperson at the organization's headquarters in Carrboro, N.C., declined to comment about DARA's concerns, referring The CJN to the group's website.

The site contained a letter to colleagues from the president of the Cairo gathering, Nevine Kassim, which, apparently without irony, notes "the natural hospitality of Cairo" and states "the goal of the SSC and the ISTH 'Reach the World' is to share scientific and clinical information in our fields."

Reached in Israel by e-mail, Seligson said Egyptian authorities turned down his visa request three times since early March. He decided against a fourth attempt when he learned "there were threats by Egyptian physician and pharmacist organizations to boycott the meeting if Israeli speakers deliver lectures at a satellite session. As a result, the Danish company Novo Nordisk [the sponsor of the session] cancelled the whole session."

"All Israelis cancelled because their lectures were cancelled or out of solidarity," he stated. "Only one visa was issued to an Israeli physician. The others were pending."

Seligson said Egyptian authorities "could have suppressed the threats by the doctors if they wished to do it." Their failure to do so "portrays a sad picture of the peace treaty between Egypt and Israel."

Though he had recommended Cairo as the venue for the May 22-25 conference, Seligson now believes no similar meetings should be scheduled in Egypt unless Israelis are permitted to attend.

In Egypt, meanwhile, the English-language Daily News reported that the head of the Doctors' Syndicate, Hamdy El-Sayyed, said any Egyptian doctor who participates in a conference hosting Israelis would be brought before a disciplinary board.

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“Israeli physicians are not allowed to enter Egypt or conduct any kind of medical activities in the country, either,” he said.

The Daily News cited the Al-Masry Al-Youm newspaper as reporting that “professors of hematology at Qasr El-Aini, Ain Shams and Alexandria medical schools expressed dissatisfaction toward the participation of two Israeli doctors in the conference. A professor at Qasr El-Aini, Mona Al-Qasas, told Al-Masry Al-Youm that the organizers had invited them [the Israeli doctors], even though Egyptian doctors threatened to boycott the conference.”

Zadik noted in a letter to the ISTH that in 2009 the Ontario Medical Association cancelled a continuing medical education event in Dubai after Israeli physicians were disallowed and the American Academy of Emergency Medicine cancelled its endorsement of an international anesthesiology conference in Dubai in March for the same reason.

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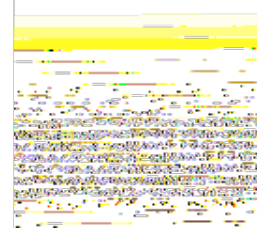
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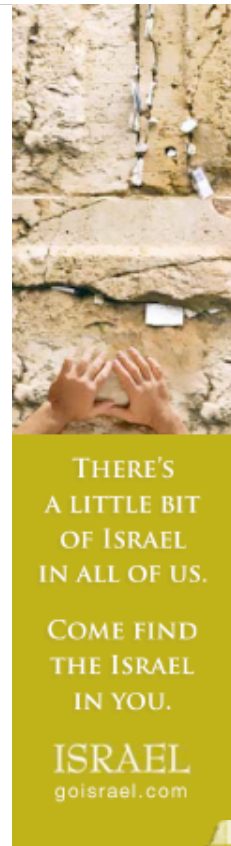


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