

Catholic priest issues 'wake-up' call on growing anti-Semitism

The world must "wake up" to a a frightening rise in attacks on Jews, says a priest who is a leading Vatican advisor on Judaism.

Electoral successes for the ultra-right across Europe is being accompanied by a frightening rise in attacks on Jews while left wing parties give ethical cover to anti-Semites with constant criticism of Israel, Fr. Patrick Desbois said at an event hosted by the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre for Holocaust Studies at Toronto's Glenn Gould Theatre Oct. 15.

"We have to wake up," said Desbois, who heads the Commission for Relations with Judaism of the French Bishops' Conference. "Everywhere the right is winning. What are we waiting for? I hope we will not wake up too late."

The world-renowned investigator who has uncovered the record and methods of Nazi death squads between 1941 and 1945 said his next challenge will be to investigate contemporary crimes against Jews in France.

"The next challenge to me is to investigate my own country," he told a crowd that included Holocaust survivors and families who wonder about the fate of their ancestors in the former Soviet Union.

A constant, weekly drum beat of terrorist attacks targeting Jews in France is transforming the country, Desbois said.

"France is a nice country. We have 20 million tourists a year," he said. "But we have military even around Notre Dame Cathedral."

Desbois is the founder of Yahad-In Unum, a French organization that locates sites of mass graves of executed Jews in the former Soviet Union, and the author of *The Holocaust by Bullets* and *In Broad Daylight*. He has also been consulting with the United Nations on the legacy of atrocities left by ISIS in Iraq.

Two years of investigating the ISIS genocide of Iraq's Yazidi minority in Sinjar has convinced Desbois the Islamic State's death squads perfected techniques the Nazis pioneered 70 years ago.

Ideology, sex and money were the key ingredients in the Nazi formula for successful death squads, Desbois said. "Without these three pillars, you cannot have a genocide."

The soldiers in these squads profited by robbing Jewish families before they herded them to mass graves where they were shot – telling their victims they would be deported to Palestine.

The Nazi program of village-by-village elimination of Jews (“one bullet, one Jew” was the frugal formula, killing 2.4 million of the six million Jews murdered in the Holocaust, said Desbois.

“The difference between ISIS and the Nazis is that they (ISIS) thought they can brainwash the people,” Desbois said. “And it worked.”

Desbois’ Yahad-In Unum team has uncovered mass graves and killing sites from the Iraqi city of Mosul to the Syrian border, and spoken to Yazidis who were so brutalized and terrorized that they identified with the men who killed their families and neighbours.

“ISIS is not dead,” he said. “ISIS, he has big friends all around. But don’t ask me who because I must go back.”

Debbie Talker, whose grandparents escaped the Soviet Union during the Second World War, came out to hear Desbois talk as a way of honouring forgotten relatives.

“I’m sure some of my relatives I don’t even know about were buried in those – they weren’t even graves – those holes in the ground,” she said.

Talker is grateful for Desbois’ mission, affirmed by both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis, to discover the truth about Europe’s hidden mass graves.

“The fact that he’s Catholic, that makes it even more remarkable,” she said.

The Jewish community is very worried that people are forgetting the Holocaust, said Alan Farber, one of the organizers of the Simon Wiesenthal event.

“It’s terribly important that we deal with the Holocaust, the Nazis. When six million people are murdered and it happens to be the biggest number in one shot, we have to remember that,” he said. “We’re just protecting our hides.”