

Holocaust survivors denounce pope's Croatia statement

By [Global Research](#)

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BELGRADE, WASHINGTON — The American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors on June 6 blasted Pope Benedict XVI over his statement about WW2 Croatian Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac.

The spiritual leader of the Roman Catholics claimed during his visit to Zagreb that Stepinac – tried and found guilty of collaboration with the fascist Ustasha regime of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) – was a defender of Jews, Orthodox Christians and anyone under persecution.

That regime ran death camps, including the largest – Jasenovac, where Serbs, but also Jews and Roma, were slaughtered.

Stepinac, beatified by Pope John Paul II in 1998, is an “adored personage in Croatia”, according to a Beta report, citing AFP.

Visiting Stepinac’s grave in Zagreb the pope said this cardinal “knew how to resist totalitarianism in all its forms, as a defender of Jews, Orthodox Christians and any persecuted group under the Nazi and fascist dictatorship, and an advocate for believers and persecuted and murdered priests under communism”.

The American Gathering of Jewish Holocaust Survivors and Their Descendants denounced the pope for honoring Stepinac, recalling that the Zagreb cardinal was a passionate supporter of the Ustashe, whose brutalities were so extreme that they even shocked some of their Nazi masters.

A press release from the organization also said that the pope was right to condemn the Ustashe regime, but wrong to pay tribute to one of its most prominent backers.

“Not likely” In Belgrade, meanwhile, it was reported that the Serbian Orthodox Church (SPC) will “most likely not invite Pope Benedict XVI to Serbia”.

There were some announcements that the invitation could come as plans were made for the celebration of 1,700 years of the Edict of Milan in 2013.

The SPC Assembly of Bishops has not reached an agreement on the matter, Tanjug learned at the Patriarchate.

The pope might have received the invitation had he visited Jasenovac during his visit to Croatia this weekend and paid homage to the victims of the WW2 concentration camp at

that locality, where around 700,000 Serbs and about 100,000 Jews and Roma were killed – according to the most frequently cited data and report of a commission set up after the war for establishing the truth about the camp – a source from the Patriarchate said.

As that did not happen, and the head of the Roman Catholic Church visited the grave of the Croatian Cardinal Alojzije Stepinac, who was tried for collaboration with the Nazis after the war, “it is certain that the invitation to the pope to come to Serbia will have to wait for some other time”.

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