

## No pogroms here

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TEHRAN, Dec. 19 (MNA) -- With all the uproar about Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad's anti-Zionist statements, it's necessary to set the record straight by putting things in historical perspective.

A small Jewish community has been living in Iran for over 2500 years, and they have never been persecuted. Today they number about 25,000. The Iranian Jews have synagogues, observe their religious rituals, and have complete freedom of religion.

The Jewish community has one representative in the Iranian parliament, which is called the Majlis. Iran's other religious minorities also have proportional representation in parliament. The Zoroastrians have one seat, the Armenian Christians have two seats, and one MP represents the Assyrian and Chaldean Christian communities.

Although life is not perfect for Iran's Jews and there is some prejudice against

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them, there have never been pogroms against the Jews here. Can Poland or Russia say that? Can several other European countries say that? A careful examination of history shows that the Jews have actually been safer in Iran than in Western countries.



Tomb of Daniel

The Jews have never been banned from Iran, whereas they were banned in certain European countries. The Jews of Iran were never locked up in ghettos, as was the case in some European countries.

In 2500 years, not one synagogue has been destroyed in Iran. Jewish graveyards have never been desecrated in Iran. In contrast, this still occurs in some Western countries. There has never been a Kristallnacht in Iran.

According to some historians, Jews traveled to Iran as early as 800 BC. However, the first Jews who settled in Iran probably immigrated to the country in 539 BC, the year the Persian king Cyrus the Great conquered Babylon and set the Jews free from their captivity in that land. The ancient Persians were always opposed to racism, oppression, religious persecution, and slavery, and this tradition is still alive in modern Iran.

After conquering Babylon, Cyrus the Great issued a declaration freeing all slaves and proclaiming freedom of religion and respect for all nations in the Persian Empire. His declaration is recorded on the Cyrus Cylinder, which is currently in the British Museum, to the dismay of Iranians, who would like to see this important cultural artifact returned. A replica of the Cyrus Cylinder is on display at the United Nations headquarters in New York, and the UN translated it into all six of its official languages in 1971. Many have called the declaration the world's first human rights charter.

To this day, Jews still name their children Cyrus, which is derived from the ancient Persian name Kurosh.

The Old Testament praises the Persians for treating the Jews fairly.

The Prophet Daniel (peace be upon him) was an advisor of the Persian kings Cyrus and Darius I. His tomb is located in southwestern Iran in a shrine in Susa, which is called Shoush in modern Persian. Jews, Christians, and Muslims all visit the shrine, which is a sign of the peaceful coexistence of Iran's religious communities.

The Jews lived peacefully in Iran for over 25 centuries, both when it was a Zoroastrian majority country and after it became a Muslim majority country.

However, after the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, many Iranian Jews feared that the anti-Zionist stance adopted by the new government would lead to persecution. Due to this apprehension, about 25,000 Jews left the

country in a few years. At the time, seeing that half of Iran's Jewish community had immigrated to other countries, some biased Western commentators said that the Iranian Muslims were hoping that all the Jews would leave. Yet, quite the contrary, many Iranians wanted the Jews to stay because they believed that a mass exodus of all the country's Jews would have given the rest of the world the impression that Iran had become a prejudiced country. In the end, the Jews who stayed saw that they would not be persecuted.

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With all this history, how can people call Iran an anti-Semitic country? It is true that Iranians are opposed to the racist ideology of the Zionists, who have occupied Palestine, displaced many Palestinians from their homeland, denied them the right of return, and oppressed the Palestinians who remain in the occupied territories. However, Iranian Muslims, and all the rest of the world's Muslims, respect Judaism as a monotheistic divinely revealed religion and respect the practicing Jews as People of the Book.

In fact, the Jews lived in many Islamic countries for centuries. The animosity between Muslims and Jews only arose after the racist ideology of Zionism led to the occupation of Palestine and the establishment of the Zionist regime in 1948.

Judaism is not Zionism, and Zionism is not Judaism. Even many Orthodox Jews, like the members of the Neturei Karta organization, are opposed to Zionism.

Everyone who criticizes Zionism is not an anti-Semite.

Some say that Jews who are opposed to Zionism are afflicted with self-hatred. That is just Zionist propaganda. Did anyone ever say that white South Africans who were opposed to apartheid were afflicted with self-hatred?

Unfortunately, the Western media usually ignore the fact that Iran has a Jewish community because it would ruin the false image of Iran as an anti-Semitic country that they have created. However, on rare occasions, a few Western media outlets have reported the fact that Jews are living normal lives in Iran.

Iran is not a racist country. In fact, Iran has been recognized as one of the pioneers of the anti-racist struggle.

Iran is not an anti-Semitic country. History does not lie.

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