

Protest letter of Aamir Qureshi for not request to proceed with the invitation of Mr. Michael Parenti (supporter of war criminal Slobodan Milosevic and genocide denier) as guest speaker for the Peace Center's 31 May fundraising event

I am writing to request that you reconsider hosting Michael Parenti at your fundraiser on May 31. Why?

Because I think that Parenti's writings and activities* in support of Slobodan Milosevic should put him outside the bounds of the progressive community. Note that Milosevic, former President of Serbia and Yugoslavia, was charged with war crimes and crimes against humanity in connection with the wars in Bosnia, Croatia and Kosovo by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. (He died of a heart attack during the trial.)

Parenti should not be considered a suitable speaker for a Peace & Justice Center.

Many of you will remember that Parenti was hosted in San Jose on several occasions by SBM and a few years ago by SJPJC. So why am I bringing this up now?

I visited Bosnia last year. I had already read a lot about the war since following it from India in the mid 1990s. The most poignant part of my trip was Srebrenica, a remote town in Eastern Bosnia. It was a UN protected enclave or a safe haven for Bosnian Muslims who had been ethnically cleansed from the rest of Eastern Bosnia. In July 1995, the Bosnian Serb soldiers overran the enclave right in front of the Dutch UN troops. In the following days, over 7,000 Bosnian men and boys were murdered in detention camps around the town in arguably the worst tragedy in Europe since WW2. The bodies of these 7,000 victims (out of the 8,000 missing) have been identified through DNA testing by a group called ICMP in what has been a 15 year effort. Parenti denies the extent of this massacre and blames the town Muslims for provoking it. If this massacre didn't happen as Parenti claims, I wonder what lies under the graves over 7,000 men and boys that I saw at the graveyard at the edge of the enclave.

Nobody pointed out Parent's past writings in support of Milosevic when SBM and SJPJC sponsored those past events with him. Perhaps we were too overwhelmed by the Iraq war to look at an even worse war that took place only 7 years earlier?

Not many people know Parenti in the Muslim community and hence the event on May 31 could go unnoticed but then some people do, particularly in the Afghan community who have noticed his views in support of the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan in the 1980s. Note that other than Palestine, there is no issue which affected Muslims as much as Bosnia, not even Iraq. It wasn't just the extent of the war crimes, but the nature of the crimes: rape camps among other things. You can see Parenti minimizing these crimes here and you can read WILPF's article on the mass rape of Bosnian women here.

Hosting Parenti, an apologist for these crimes, should put the peace center at odds with Muslim, Women and progressive groups.

Aamir Qureshi

*More about Parenti - the preface for one of his books was written by Milosevic himself from his cell in Hague. Parenti subsequently headed the US chapter of International Committee to Defend Slobodan Milosevic.