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Persecuted by the persecuted

EVEN the United States Ambassador to Malaysia Marie T. Huhtala was surprised. The call made by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre to boycott tourism and investment in Malaysia was, she admitted, extreme.

Of course, Huhtala also pointed out that the call was made in response to the "offensive" statements made by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the recently-concluded OIC Summit at Putrajaya.

The Jewish centre, a foundation to commemorate the survivors of the Nazi holocaust, also insisted that business should not go on as usual "as long as the head of Malaysia continues to validate the ugly racist hate of anti-Semitism that invites anti-Jewish hate crimes and terrorism".

The rabbi who made the call also said that Dr Mahathir's "serial anti-Semitism has now moved the most virulent anti-Semitic stereotypes into the mainstream of the body-politik of the Islamic and Asian communities".

Such a perspective is tiringly one-sided and misshapen by the burden of self-perceived victimhood carried by many in the Jewish community today.

But this is to be expected. Historical grievances - whether they are felt by the Jews, Christians or Muslims - are rarely forgotten. They become part of a people's collective memory; the narrative parents tell their children; the story from which a group draws its sense of identity.

In this instance, written into the script of the Jewish psyche is a note of injustice not yet avenged, which is pulled out and reenacted in moments of real or imagined crises.

As Dr Mahathir rightly pointed out in an interview after the OIC: "The reaction of the world shows that they (Jews) do control the world."

Indeed, when Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi labelled Muslims as terrorists, why were the White House, European Union, Australia, Jewish groups and others silent?

Montesquieu was right: Every religion that is persecuted becomes itself persecuting. This may be the lesson to learn as Jews lambast us for a speech that was not even meant for them.