

REMEMBERING THOSE we lost in Argentina

A special location for the World Jewish Congress Conference

BY WENDY KAHN



ON JULY 18 1994, A SUICIDE BOMBER DROVE A CAR filled with hundreds of kilograms of explosives into the Jewish community's AMIA building in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Eighty-five people were killed and hundreds were injured. The AMIA bombing (proceeded in 1991 with the attack on the Israeli Embassy in Buenos Aires where 29 civilians died) became one of the precursors of the wave of global terror that has swept the world and escalated in decades since then. Last month, I participated in a World Jewish Congress Conference in Buenos Aires as a member of the SAJBD delegation. One of the reasons Argentina was selected for this meeting was that the dates would coincide with the anniversary of the Israeli Embassy bombing on the 17 March 1992.

On the morning of the 17th, 400 delegates attending the conference filed into the AMIA building; Argentina's equivalent of Beyachad. On the wall outside was a black board with 85 names written in white paint. Each name represented an innocent Argentinian, some Jewish, others not, who perished at the hands of this brutal attack. As a communal Jewish leader, the name AMIA has always been a name that I feel close to. It has unfortunately become associated worldwide as the scene of one of the most horrendous

terror attacks, rather than a warm, inviting, dynamic communal centre.

A witness to the attack, Daniel Pomerantz, watched in horror as the AMIA centre collapsed following the explosions. He shared with us his vivid memories of "the darkness, the screams, the pain, the horror". For me, it was an emotional, sobering, and even haunting experience listening to this account. This is a community that has lost so much. In the two attacks in 1992 and 1994 they lost 114 precious souls and a further 540 people were injured – people whose lives would never be quite the same again. And the Iranian perpetrators of these barbaric attacks have never been brought to justice. We met the daughter and mother of Alberto Nisman, the Argentinian Prosecutor who came so close to exposing those responsible. Hours before his testimony in front of the Argentinian Parliament last year he was found dead in the bathroom of his flat with a gunshot wound. He was going to present evidence that the Argentinian government had planned to clear the names of the Iranian politicians and diplomats accused of planning the AMIA attack.

A ray of hope emerged as Argentinian President Mauricio Macri, who was elected in November last year, addressed our con-



ference assuring us that "We are fully committed to contribute in any way we can to make headway with this investigation." He added, "Here we suffer the ravaging consequences of two bomb attacks. We are still in the dark of what happened. We are fully committed to contribute in any way we can to make headway with this investigation." Only months into his term of office and already Macri has cancelled the controversial memorandum of understanding his predecessor had signed with Iran with respect to the AMIA bombing probe and declared the deal 'unconstitutional'. We joined communities from around the world in calling for justice for the victims of the Buenos Aires terror attacks.

And then we returned home to our countries. And the terror continued. In that one week, the Ivory Coast, Ankara, Istanbul, and Brussels were targeted. In Israel, the death toll from terror attacks rose to 34 since September 2015 with 411 injured. ISIS threats to attack a Jewish school in Turkey were exposed. While we need to be vigilant and prepared, we need to continue to live proud Jewish lives. If we don't, the terror will have been successful. In the words of the witness to the AMIA bombing Daniel Pomerantz: "They tried to destroy our community and what we do. We need to make sure that we keep going." ■