

## Palestinian youth orchestra disbanded over concert for Holocaust survivors

By The Associated Press

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Palestinian authorities disbanded a youth orchestra from a West Bank refugee camp after it played for a group of Holocaust survivors in Israel, a local official said on Sunday.

Adnan Hindi of the Jenin camp called the Holocaust a political issue and accused conductor Wafa Younis of unknowingly dragging the children into a political dispute.

He added that Younis has been barred from the camp and the apartment where she taught the 13-member Strings of Freedom orchestra has been boarded up.

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"She exploited the children," said Hindi, the head of the camp's popular committee, which takes on municipal duties. "She will be forbidden from doing any activities.... We have to protect our children and our community."



The move highlights the sensitivity of many Palestinians over acknowledging Jewish suffering, fearing it would weaken their own historical grievances against Israel.

"The Holocaust happened, but we are facing a similar massacre by the Jews themselves," Hindi said. "We lost our land, and we were forced to flee and we've lived in refugee camps for the past 50 years."

Six million Jews were killed in the Nazi Holocaust of World War II, and hundreds of thousands of Jewish survivors emigrated to Israel after the war.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians either fled or were expelled from their homes in the war that followed Israel's creation - an event known by Palestinians as their Naqba, or catastrophe.

Kaynan Rabino, director of Ruach Tova, or Good Spirit, the charity that organized the event, said he was disappointed to hear about the reaction in Jenin.

"They approached us and volunteered to play. Wafa knew the orchestra would play before Holocaust survivors," he said. "We wanted to bring people's hearts closer together and if they are against that then that's a real shame."

Hindi said Palestinians - especially in his hardscrabble cinder block refugee camp - had suffered at the hands of Israel and demanded their grievances be acknowledged first.

The refugee camp in the northern West Bank was the scene of a deadly April 2002 battle where 23 Israeli soldiers were killed, alongside 53 Palestinian militants and civilians, in several days of battle. The clash destroyed swathes of the refugee camp.

The camp's residents are descendants of Palestinians who were displaced during Israel's war of independence.

The youths, aged 11 to 18, of the modest orchestra [performed a goodwill concert for elderly survivors](#) in the Israeli town of Holon Wednesday.

The event, held at the Holocaust Survivors Center in the central Israeli town, was part of Good Deeds Day, an annual event run by an organization connected to billionaire Shari Arison, Israel's richest woman.

Hindi said the children's parents were not aware that the orchestra would play for Holocaust survivors.

Younis was not immediately available for comment Sunday. But as the controversy erupted over the weekend, she said Saturday that her intention was purely to perform music. "We didn't do anything wrong," she said.

At last Wednesday's performance, most of the Holocaust survivors did not know the youths were Palestinians from the West Bank, a rare sight in Israel these days. And the youths had no idea they were performing for people who lived through Nazi genocide - or even what the Holocaust was.