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Nearly six million Jews died in the Holocaust

A prominent religious leader in Israel has caused outrage by referring to the six million victims of the Holocaust as "reincarnated sinners".

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef, who heads the country's third biggest political party, made the remarks at a religious gathering in Jerusalem on Saturday.

He also attacked Prime Minister Ehud Barak's attempts at peace with what he called Palestinians "snakes".

The remarks have been severely criticised by various political parties and Jewish leaders inside and outside the country.

The Iraqi-born Rabbi Yosef is one of the most powerful religious figures in Israel.

His Shas party has 17 members in 120-member parliament, and was a part of Ehud Barak's coalition until a month ago.

The party is opposed to any concessions to Palestinians and has been leading a campaign against Mr Barak on the issue.

"Why do you bring them (the Palestinians) close to us?" Rabbi Yosef told Saturday's gathering. "You bring snakes next to us. How can you make peace with a snake?"

On the Holocaust, he said the Jews who died were reincarnations of earlier souls, who, in the Rabbi's words, had sinned time and

“ These are incarnations of those who has sinned and made others sin..... They were reincarnated to make amends ”

Rabbi Ovadia Yosef

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Paul Adams reports from Jerusalem "Rarely has Rabbi Ovadia managed to offend so many people at the same time"  real [28k](#)

time again.

"These are incarnations of those who has sinned and made others sin..... They were reincarnated to make amends".

Unworthy

Prime Minister Barak told a cabinet meeting that the comments were unworthy of a rabbi of Mr Yosef's status.

Tommy Lapid, the leader of the avowedly secular Shinui party, told Israel radio the "vile statements will delight the remaining Nazis in the world".

Efraim Zuroff, head of the Jerusalem office of the Nazi-hunting Simon Wiesenthal Centre, said Rabbi Yosef's remarks will undermine the unifying affect of a national tragedy.

The public reaction has also been strong.

Israel's two main radio stations have been inundated with phone calls and fax messages, most of them criticising Rabbi Yosef's statement.

Israel is home to 230,000 people who lived in Nazi Germany or countries conquered by the Nazis.



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