

SWITZERLAND

Charity: Bush speech cut over security

■ **The host organization said security, not a torture complaint, caused the cancellation of George W. Bush's speech in Geneva.**

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Security worries on the ground in Switzerland, not fear of a torture complaint over waterboarding, led organizers to cancel former President George W. Bush's speech at a gala this week in a luxurious Swiss hotel, the Geneva based director of an Israeli charity said Monday.

Bush was expected at the Hotel President Wilson in Geneva on Saturday to speak at the opening of United Israel Appeal's 2011 campaign there, following in the footsteps of Bill Clinton who spoke at a similar event in 2003 and Rudi Giuliani in 2004.

But the charity's Geneva office director, Nati Metuki, said intelligence gathered on the internet showed a wide-range of demonstrators would converge on the hotel in a Swiss-licensed protest to disrupt the event.

"Left oriented anarchist organizations, part of them Arab, part of them anti-Israel, they all teamed together to block Bush," Metuki told The Miami Herald by telephone from the Geneva offices of the United Israel Appeal, also known as Keren Hayesod. He said an analysis of internet chatter suggested those planning to protest included demonstrators "like the ones who threw Molotov cocktails in

Davos, who come to just destroy."

Organizers also believed the event might have produced some potentially embarrassing street theater reenacting when an Iraqi journalist in 2008 threw his shoe at President Bush during a Baghdad press conference as a sign of contempt.

"The internet invited people, 'Bring a shoe with you. We'll throw it on a puppet,'" Metuki said.

In New York, the Center for Constitutional Rights said human rights groups effectively blocked Bush from making his first known trip abroad since the release of *Decision Points*, his presidential memoir. During his book tour, Bush said he personally approved the use on terror suspects of a widely condemned, near-drowning technique called waterboarding.

Law firms like CCR and human rights groups like Amnesty International seized upon the Swiss appearance to prepare a 2,500-page complaint alleging that, as president, Bush violated the Convention Against Torture. They planned to present a complaint to a Swiss prosecutor once Bush stepped on Swiss soil. Cancellation of the speech derailed those plans.

"Waterboarding is torture, and Bush has admitted, without any sign of remorse, that he approved its use," CCR staff attorney Katherine Gallagher said in a statement Monday. "This case is prepared and will be waiting for him wherever he travels

next. Torturers - even if they are former presidents of the United States - must be held to account and prosecuted."

But Metuki said the legal effort "came much after they decided to make a demonstration," and never was an issue on the radar of event organizers, "neither for the fact that we canceled nor with the fact that George Bush did not come."

"It's all rubbish," he said. "It's not true."

Bush said through a spokesman Saturday that he had planned to talk about "freedom," and the decision to cancel was entirely that of the host, which Metuki confirmed.

"President Bush has made several trips outside of the United States, including to South Korea, China, Japan, Brazil, Canada, and the Middle East," said Bush's spokesman, David Sherzer, by e-mail. "He gave more than 60 speeches last year, and we expect this year to be similar."

Metuki, who declined to say how much guests paid to see Bush talk, said the dinner would go forward as a solidarity event, but with no speaker. "Who would we substitute with somebody of this caliber?" he said. "Jimmy Carter?"

The hotel where Bush was to speak was named for the 28th president of the United States, Woodrow Wilson. A random check of rates Monday offered a special room rate for Saturday starting at \$500. The presidential suite was available, at \$10,584 for the night.

