

# Advice for Mary Robinson - Apologize

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Gerald Steinberg , THE JERUSALEM POST

Mary Robinson, who presided over the UN's notorious Durban conference in 2001, and participated in many anti-Israel sessions during her tenure as High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997-2002), is slated to receive the Presidential Medal of Freedom at the White House on Wednesday. This award has been criticized by Jewish organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League and AIPAC, and by others who blame Robinson for the destruction of the universality and moral foundation of human rights.

Many quote the late Congressman Tom Lantos (a liberal Democrat, Holocaust survivor, and a member of the American delegation to Durban), who denounced this UN event as "an anti-American, anti-Israeli circus." Lantos declared that "much of the responsibility... rests on the shoulders of UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Mary Robinson who, in her role as secretary-general of the conference, failed to provide the leadership needed to keep the conference on track."

The same applies to her role in the Human Rights Council, which was exploited for the political assault against the Jewish state, in parallel to the horrendous murders of Israelis in mass terror attacks. Robinson's behavior also set the stage for the pseudo-judicial and entirely one-sided Goldstone inquiry on Gaza.

BUT ROBINSON, like other public figures confronted with past moral lapses, has chosen to attack her critics and refuses to admit any errors in judgment. In a recent interview with RTE Radio One in Ireland, she declared "There's a lot of bullying by certain elements of the Jewish community..."

She repeated the term "bullies" in reference to those who disagree with her blind adoption of the Palestinian narrative, which starts the history of the conflict in 1967, and focuses only on the "occupation," ignoring the Arab rejectionism that led to these events.

This offensive language only highlights Robinson's problem, showing that she has learned nothing. Perhaps Robinson, who was Ireland's first female president and has numerous supporters (including in the Obama administration), has the illusion that her critics will eventually disappear, but this has not happened. At ceremonies at American universities in which she has received honorary doctorates, students and faculty have led protests. At Emory University, Prof. Kenneth Stein, who has worked with former president Jimmy Carter, noted "the apparent absence of due diligence on the part of decision makers who invited her to speak."

The White House award will not change this.

Instead, Robinson should take the opposite path by acknowledging her failure to take a moral position in protecting universal human rights, rather than promoting anti-Israel discrimination and double standards. Admitting error is never easy, particularly for a public official, but in doing so, Robinson would have a chance to correct the damage by apologizing and asking for forgiveness for her contribution to this bitter history.

The first step is to admit the obvious - that in the 2001 Durban conference, she allowed the Islamic bloc, led by Iran and Libya, to hijack the principles of human rights. Rather than promoting the myth that Durban "yielded an extraordinarily important document for those who suffer discrimination, marginalization and racism...." Robinson needs to acknowledge these errors, including agreement to hold a key preparatory committee meeting in Teheran, assuring Israeli and Jewish delegates that they would receive visas. They did not, and the vicious anti-Semitic language adopted at the Teheran meeting should have prompted her immediate resignation.

TO TAKE the courageous moral step of admitting error, Robinson also needs to publically divorce herself from the obsessive denunciations of Israel's defense against terror. These include false allegations of "collective punishment" on Gaza, and her condescending suggestion that Israelis were duped into supporting military responses to the continuous deadly rocket fire from Gaza. Recently, she said: "I cannot believe that ordinary Israeli people understand what is being done in their name; they couldn't possibly support it if they did." Such ill-advised words are clearly not the way to demonstrate understanding or contrition.

In preparing for the White House ceremony, Robinson would be well advised to see this event as a chance to undo some of the damage she has caused, and contribute to restoring the moral foundation of human rights. An apology and request for forgiveness is the right thing to do, even at this late date.

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