

Watchdog's reports on Israel are grossly biased

BY GERALD STEINBERG, THE OTTAWA CITIZEN NOVEMBER 4, 2009 3:04 AM

Re: Statistics tell the real story of rights watchdog and Israel, Oct. 31.

In the debate over Human Rights Watch's Israel agenda, James Ron and Howard Ramos' statistical defence is inadequate.

In contrast to their one-dimensional tally, which ends in 2000, NGO Monitor's weighted analysis demonstrates the distorted agenda that led HRW's founder, Robert Bernstein, to denounce the organization's role in "turning Israel into a pariah state" and abandoning core moral principles. This is also reflected in the Goldstone report on Gaza.

HRW's Middle East activities from 2004 to 2008 have consistently focused far more resources on condemnations of Israeli defence against terror than on serial human rights abusers such as Syria, Saudi Arabia and Libya. HRW reports attacking Israel are accompanied by press conferences and media campaigns, in contrast to limited statements regarding other countries, with zero impact.

Similarly, NGO Monitor studies on language show that since 2005, HRW has used particular damning and unjustified terminology in attacking Israel. In a region replete with despotic regimes, the only democracy in the Middle East was condemned for "violations of human rights law" and similar terms 33 times in 2008, compared to thirteen such citations for the Palestinians, six for Hezbollah and five for Egypt.

As a member of HRW's Canada Council, Ron should also be familiar with the exposure of a Middle East division dominated by intense ideologues, in contrast to universal human rights advocates.

Its director, Sarah Leah Whitson, supported the tendentious "Caterpillar" Israel boycott campaign, and led an HRW fundraising trip to Saudi Arabia -- an clear act of human rights hypocrisy -- invoking the danger of "pro-Israel" groups as a sales pitch. The deputy head of the division, Joe Stork, came to HRW after 20 years of denouncing Israel, including participation in a "Zionism is Racism" conference in Saddam Hussein's Iraq.

Ron and Ramos, like other members of HRW's defence team, chose to ignore these blatant moral failures.

Instead, they justify HRW's obsessive focus on Israel by admitting that "like most any advocacy group, watchdogs respond to media demand," in contrast to the universal human rights principles they claim to promote. The bogus HRW reports have helped to create the media demand, while Bernstein's "moral force" has been betrayed by grossly biased officials with a craving for headlines.

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