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## Exposing the human rights facade

By G. STEINBERG

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The people and institutions that claim to uphold human rights and democracy are in fact nullifying these core moral principles.

At 87, Robert Bernstein, founder of Human Rights Watch, began his second life. Thirty- three years after he founded Helsinki Watch in 1976, which evolved into HRW and became one of the most influential human rights organizations in the world, he disowned his earlier creation. In October 2009, in an explosive column published in *The New York Times*, Bernstein denounced HRW and its leaders for distorting and exploiting human rights to attack democracies, and for playing a central role in turning Israel into a “pariah state.”

Now, Bernstein has gone further in working to reverse the moral failures of HRW and the wider network of highly politicized groups that use the façade of human rights to attack moral principles. Delivering the Goldstein Lecture on Human Rights at the University of Nebraska at Omaha [published in full on page 13 of today's Jerusalem Post], he contrasted Israel's democratic values with their notable absence in the Arab regimes and Iran. But most of HRW's humanrights accusations are directed at Israel. Bernstein demonstrated that these “human rights organizations, including the one I founded,” as well Amnesty International, the Carter Center and other groups, are leading the political war against Israel by working closely with corrupt UN frameworks.

His involvement in free speech grew out of his background as a book publisher. In the 1970s, he went to the Soviet Union to negotiate copyright issues, and met the dissident scientist Andrei Sakharov and his wife, Yelena Bonner. Bernstein encouraged Sakharov to write an autobiography, and provided support as he came under increasing harassment, including exile to Gorky. (Natan Sharansky was jailed and sent to the gulag for his work with Sakharov.) The Soviet regime revoked Bernstein's visa in a failed attempt to end this support.

This was the beginning of Helsinki Watch, which grew into HRW.

After the Cold War, Bernstein turned his attention to human rights issues in China, leaving HRW in the hands of cynical leaders who played a leading role in exploiting human rights principles to attack Israel. As the assault grew, amid the carnage of Palestinian terror bombings that killed more than 1,200 Israelis, Bernstein returned to an active role, joining HRW's Middle East North Africa Advisory Board and observing its cynical manipulation of moral rhetoric.

He quickly noted the close cooperation between HRW and the UN Human Rights Council, which was “so critical of Israel that any fair-minded person would disqualify them from participating in attempts to settle issues involving Israel.” The UNHRC sought out “prominent Jews known for their anti-Israel views,” such as Richard Falk. (Falk had written an article comparing Israel's treatment of Palestinians to Hitler's treatment of

Jews in the Holocaust.) When Israel objected, HRW “leaped to his defense, putting out a press release comparing Israel with North Korea and Burma in not cooperating with the UN.”

The text defending Falk was written by Joe Stork, deputy director of HRW’s Middle East Division. As Bernstein reminds us, Stork had been an editor of a notorious pro-Palestinian newsletter before being hired by HRW.

Most of HRW’s accusations against Israel were not based on the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights but on subjective interpretations of the laws of war, the Geneva Conventions and international humanitarian law. But HRW has “little expertise about modern asymmetrical war.” Noting that Israel was responding to terror attacks from Iran’s non-state proxies – Hizbullah and Hamas – Bernstein relates the ways in which HRW’s reporting on this conflict consistently “faulted Israel as the principal offender.”

At first, Bernstein, like most journalists, diplomats and academics, was “inclined to believe what Human Rights Watch was reporting.

However, as I saw Human Rights Watch’s attacks on almost every issue become more and more hostile, I wondered if their new focus on war was accurate.”

THE BLOW that led a reluctant Bernstein to break publicly with his organization was HRW’s central role in promoting Richard Goldstone – one of executive director Kenneth Roth’s closest allies and an HRW board member – to lead the UN’s assault following the Gaza war.

“Human Rights Watch has been by far the biggest supporter” of this campaign to “bring war crimes allegations against Israel – based on [Goldstone’s] report.”

As Bernstein observed, HRW has ignored “many responsible analyses challenging the war crimes accusations made by Goldstone,” as well as detailed refutations of HRW’s own reports, which were filled with unverifiable and false claims.

Referring to the unresolved Marc Garlasco affair, Bernstein noted that “a military expert working for Human Rights Watch who seemed to wish to contest these reports was dismissed and... is under a gag order. This is antithetical to the transparency that Human Rights Watch asks of others.”

And he recalled that when HRW’s Sarah Leah Whitson went to Saudi Arabia in 2009 to raise funds by selling its support for Goldstone’s attacks on Israel, it is doubtful that she discussed textbooks published by the Saudis calling Jews “apes and pigs.”

Bernstein’s painful accounting regarding the organization he founded has of course been summarily rejected by this corrupt human rights priesthood and its acolytes. As a result, the people and institutions that claim to uphold human rights and democracy are in fact accelerating the tragic destruction of these core moral principles.

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