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**Page Six**



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# Selling Out to Soros

## Rights group's dubious record

By GERALD STEINBERG

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In accepting a huge grant from George Soros, Human Rights Watch has spurned the public advice (and warning) offered nearly a year ago by its founder Robert Bernstein. Rather than grapple with the serious problems of credibility and bias, HRW Executive Director Kenneth Roth has cemented relations with Soros -- a partisan ideologue who also supports Moveon.org, a controversial advocacy group.

Bernstein severely criticized HRW in a New York Times oped. To "resurrect itself as a moral force in the Middle East and throughout the world," he warned, the organization must return "to its founding mission and the spirit of humility that animated it." In its earlier days, he noted, "to create clarity in human rights," HRW aimed to "draw a sharp line between the democratic and nondemocratic worlds."



AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Soros: His \$100 million donation to Human Rights Watch will make up for grants lost because of recent scandals.

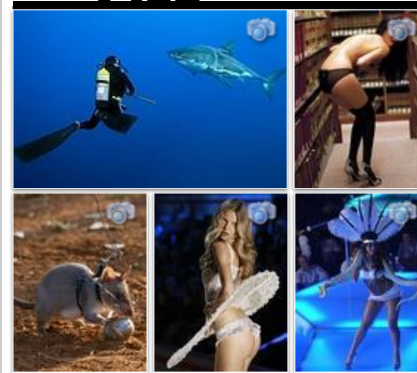
Over the years, HRW lost its moral compass and substituted ideology and an Israel-obsessed agenda. Bernstein was trying to awaken the group's leaders to the decayed state of what was once a human-rights superpower.

Instead, Roth has opted to accept Soros' \$100 million grant -- which should offset nicely the income lost from core donors who've walked away in the wake of a host of scandals. It won't, however, address the root problems.

In May 2009, HRW launched a fund-raising drive in Saudi Arabia, using its anti-Israel record to solicit funds from "prominent members of Saudi society." That September, HRW "senior military analyst" Marc Garlasco was "outed" as an avid collector of Nazi memorabilia -- a troubling hobby for the main author of a number of HRW reports that accused Israel of "war crimes" and other violations.

Add to this the recent work by NGO Monitor, the watchdog group that I lead, and others on the severe ideological biases at HRW's Middle East and North Africa (MENA) division. The systematic research in NGO Monitor's report and articles in The New Republic and the Sunday Times detail the severe ideological biases of MENA director Sarah Leah Whitson and deputy director

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Both Whitson and Stork came to HRW with backgrounds in pro-Palestinian political activities, and continue to promote their anti-Israel political agendas through their "human rights" work.

Whitson was and remains an advocate of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement. In July 2009, she referred to Israel's "system of apartheid." Stork's publications in the Middle East Research and Information Project from the 1980s and 1990s focus on attacking Zionism, Israel and American "imperialism" in the Middle East, while promoting the Palestinian narrative.

This is further evidence of Bernstein's conclusion that HRW is "helping those who wish to turn Israel into a pariah state."

The group has relentlessly promoted the UN-commissioned report by one of its former board members, Richard Goldstone -- a report that reflects the same biases and dubious research practices as so many recent HRW papers. In 2009, HRW's 34 pro-Goldstone publications outnumbered its documents on all the countries in the Middle East except Israel and Iran.

The bias is indisputable: HRW's publications on "Israel and the Occupied Territories" made up 28 percent of its total Mideast output in 2009.

Which makes it a fine fit for George Soros, whose own biases are well-established. In the Middle East, for example, his Open Society Institute exclusively supports advocacy groups that campaign internationally to undermine the elected governments of Israel -- organizations such as Adalah, Peace Now, Breaking the Silence, Gisha and Yesh Din.

In extending his control over HRW, Soros seeks to increase its staff by 40 percent, reposition it as a major international player and restore its influence as an arbiter on universal human rights. But while his grant will alleviate the crisis caused by HRW's declining income, it only deepens the moral crisis.

Only by changing the organization's hiring practices, research priorities, methodologies and biases -- especially at MENA -- can Human Rights Watch recover its image as the "gold standard" of human-rights groups.

*Gerald Steinberg is president of NGO Monitor, a Jerusalem-based research institution, and a professor of political science at Bar Ilan University*

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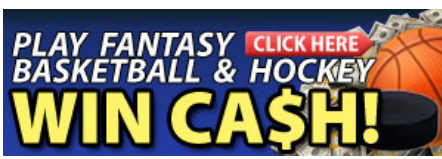
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