

Adalah, the NIF and BDS: End the secrecy

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NGO Monitor brought to NIF's attention that one of their major grantees was scheduled to speak at this year's "Apartheid Week."

'Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice, shame on me.' This adage might have occurred to the officials, donors and supporters of the New Israel Fund (NIF) when they learned that an official from Adalah – one of their major grantees – was scheduled to speak at this year's "Apartheid Week" at an event sponsored by BDS Geneva.

Suhad Bishara, the director of Adalah's Land and Planning Rights Unit, was featured prominently in the publicity for the event. After NGO Monitor brought this to NIF's attention, Bishara's name and affiliation were removed from some of the advertising, and was replaced by a statement reading, "For security reasons, we do not mention [the speaker's] name on the site."

NIF officials should not have been surprised by Adalah's ongoing role in promoting BDS (boycotts, divestment and sanctions) and other forms of political warfare. The organization has made no secret of its agenda, including the participation in the infamous NGO Forum of the 2001 UN Durban Conference.

The NGO Forum's "Final Declaration," which is still posted on Adalah's website, calls for the "complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state."

Expanding on this theme, Adalah's so-called "Democratic Constitution" (2007) called for replacing the Jewish state with a "democratic, bilingual and multicultural" framework and for a redefinition of the "symbols of the state." Jewish immigration would be restricted solely for "humanitarian reasons."

And following the publication of the Goldstone Report, Adalah joined Palestinian NGOs in urging governments to "re-evaluate their relationship with Israel."

Such activities are in direct contradiction of NIF's recently adopted funding guidelines and principles, which explicitly exclude groups that "work to deny the right of the Jewish people to sovereign self-determination within Israel" and other forms of anti-Israel demonization. But for some reason, the NIF funding for Adalah – \$475,950 authorized in 2010 – has continued.

For many years, the organization has had trouble implementing "red lines," and in a number of cases, has been embarrassed and forced to backpedal before taking action. In 2004, the NIF awarded a fellowship to Shama Leibowitz, who went to the US and promoted BDS, among other activities inconsistent with NIF's declared objectives. (Last week, a current NIF fellow, Moriel Rothman, noted in an op-ed, "I have become deeply frustrated by the political manipulation of the Holocaust to distract from Israel's crimes against Palestinians.") NIF also provided seed funding for a radical NGO known as ICAHD, which violates nearly all of NIF's guidelines and principles, only ending funding after the damage had been done.

More recently, it took two years for NIF to finally end support for the Coalition of Women for Peace

(CWP), which is centrally involved in the BDS campaigns. Another group – Mada al-Carmel – which is also a major source of delegitimization and advocates for a “one-state” solution, was still listed in NIF’s latest published budget (for 2010), although incoming president Brian Lurie has stated that the funding has now ended. In each of these cases, NIF did not make any public statement warning others not to repeat the mistakes, and seems to have learned no lessons, which is apparent in the case of funding for Adalah.

Although, or perhaps because, NIF is an extremely powerful political institution, with an annual budget of over \$30 million, whose policies and activities affect the lives of all Israelis, its leaders are out of touch and very slow to react. The organization’s inability to properly monitor its grantees’ activities creates an environment ripe for major mistakes, which have been very costly for Israel.

When the contrast between NIF’s promotional claims and the reality of its political activities and funding is noted, they lash out angrily. For an organization claiming a “liberal and progressive” agenda, the NIF is particularly hostile to any form of criticism. When caught, as in each of the examples cited above, NIF’s public relations team resorts to vicious personal attacks against whistle-blowers for “speaking truth to power.”

This was also the case with Adalah’s scheduled role in the Apartheid Week event in Switzerland. When NGO Monitor sent a letter to NIF officials to bring this to their attention, the response was a public attack accusing NGO Monitor of “smearing” the organization and attempting to deflect attention from Adalah’s false “apartheid” and “racism” rhetoric.

The “fool me” adage stops after the second occurrence, but NIF is now well beyond this. And the personal, vindictive attacks are unconstructive, to understate the case, creating a contentious relationship.

Instead of lashing out, NIF has the opportunity to demonstrate that its guidelines are serious.

Given the extensive public evidence of Adalah’s true agenda, if NIF chooses to not sever ties with the NGO, one would have to assume that NIF is knowingly being fooled and is happy to go along for the ride.

The writer is president of NGO Monitor, a Jerusalem-based research institution dedicated to promoting universal human rights and to encouraging civil discussion on the reports and activities of non-governmental organizations, particularly in the Middle East.