

From Tragedy to Farce: International Human Rights Day 2012

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2012 was another dismal year, and there is little to celebrate on International Human Rights Day. The carnage in Syria has destroyed more than 40,000 lives, and in Egypt, a new dictatorship has replaced the previous one. In Iran, last year's democracy protesters are forgotten, and the Stalinist show trials designed to intimidate these advocates are ignored. On these and other cases of blatant human rights violations, the self-appointed moral guardians in the UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) respond with little more than lip service.

Tragically, Human Rights Day, which marks the anniversary of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Conventions, now serves as a reminder of the abject failure of organizations that claim to promote these principles. Ignoring the pleas of victims around the world, the UN Human Rights Council routinely exploits the rhetoric of international law as a weapon in the political war targeting Israel. The nation-state of the Jewish people is a convenient diversion from so many real abuses, which explains the obsessive "war crimes" claims, as illustrated again during the recent Gaza conflict.

To make matters worse, the human rights NGOs that were founded optimistically in order to promote universal moral behavior have become accomplices in promoting this immorality. The leaders of powerful groups like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Oxfam, the Paris-based International Federation of Human Rights and others with multi-million-dollar budgets, work closely with and support the agendas of the UNHRC and other corrupt international frameworks.

Instead of speaking truth to this blatant abuse of power, officials of these wayward human rights groups are part of the problem. For the so-called "human rights community", Iran's supply of Fajr missiles to Hamas and Hezbollah, for use in targeting Israeli civilians, is not even on the agenda. And, as recently noted in the Wall St. Journal, Ken Roth, the head of Human Rights Watch and an obsessive anti-Israel ideologue, cannot bring himself to condemn the genocidal rhetoric of the Iranian regime.

In 2012, HRW, Amnesty International, and the other groups have accelerated efforts to transform human rights and international law into ideological platforms used to attack Western democracies and open societies. Oxfam has given more attention to allegations against Israel than to the carnage in Syria. And beyond Israel, a disproportionate percentage of Amnesty's reports and campaigns focus on attacking the US and NATO countries for alleged infractions in Iraq and Afghanistan, while terrorists and their state supporters get relatively little attention. This is a paternalistic and patronizing distortion, which assumes that al-Qa'ida or Taliban "militants" are exempt from human rights requirements, and are held to a lower standard.

During the recent Gaza conflict, Amnesty's façade of expertise and morality was further exposed. This organization completely ignored the steady increase in Hamas rocket attacks against Israelis – every one a war crime — and showed no interest in the victims of these attacks, again demonstrating that human rights requirements do not include Israelis. In contrast, when the IDF responded with a pin-point targeted attack against the head of the Hamas terror infrastructure, Amnesty immediately condemned this as "indiscriminate", and absurdly blamed Israel alone for "re-igniting the conflict." As in the past, Amnesty officials who issued these condemnations had no clue about events on the ground, and simply vented their anti-Israel ideology.

Amnesty also launched a direct assault on Israel's right to self-defense, calling on the UN Security Council to impose an "international arms embargo on Israel, Hamas, and Palestinian armed groups in Gaza." Amnesty's attempt to equate the transfer of weapons to Israel for legitimate defense with clandestinely smuggled arms to a terrorist organization is immoral and absurd.

Sunjeev Bery, Advocacy Director for the Middle East and North Africa section of Amnesty International-USA, Edith Garwood, Country Specialist on Israel for Amnesty USA, and Amnesty-UK's Middle East campaign manager, Krystian Benedict, used their Twitter accounts to repeat Amnesty's tendentious allegations regarding Israel. Benedict also indirectly branded three Members of Parliament as warmongers because they are Jewish, (his idea of a "joke") prompting British MP John Mann, chair of the UK All-Party Parliamentary Group against Antisemitism, to ask Amnesty to clarify its policies towards preventing antisemitism. This complaint forced Amnesty to initiate long overdue and as yet unspecified disciplinary action.

Reflecting these failures, Amnesty is in deep crisis, with rapidly declining membership, a loss of funding, labor disputes following employee lay-offs, internal ideological conflict, and a corruption scandal whose details were hidden from the membership. Amnesty International has gone from tragedy to farce, and may not survive this crisis.

Under these circumstances, it is difficult to find hope, but there are some positive signs for human rights. Canada and some European governments that have, in the past, blindly given large budgets to these groups, are now being more selective, examining the actual activities, rather than relying on self-promoting slogans. Similarly, some important philanthropies, such as the Ford Foundation (which funded the infamous anti-Israel and antisemitic NGO Forum of the 2001 UN Durban Conference) have also pulled away from such blind and destructive support.

In addition, after Judge Goldstone correctly, if belatedly, renounced the pseudo-report that bore his name, and which was based on hundreds of false NGO allegations of "war crimes", the intensity of these political assaults decreased significantly, with the notable exception of Amnesty. Serious journalists also learned to be more careful and avoided parroting these allegations. These are small signs of progress, but perhaps by next year's International Human Rights Day, there may be something to celebrate.