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Why is the NIF panicking?

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*Instead of lashing out, NIF officials should promote a vibrant society based on twin pillars of Zionism, democracy.*

The New Israel Fund is a well-established and influential organization, but its disproportionate responses to criticism and challenges suggests that below the façade of power and responsibility, its leaders are in panic.

For years, NGO Monitor research has systematically demonstrated that a significant portion of NIF grants have funded groups that invoke “apartheid” rhetoric, lead BDS efforts and even call for the end of Israel as a Jewish state, among other demonizing activity counterproductive to the pursuit of peace.

We repeatedly have asked to meet with NIF, to share our information, and to help them better monitor their grantees. In almost every instance, their public relations gurus – born from the cutthroat worlds of Washington, DC, and Israel’s political wars – have responded with personal attacks, false allegations and other uncivil rhetoric that takes the conversation in an entirely negative direction.

The latest instance occurred in an NIF-sponsored article that referred to NGO Monitor as “ultra-nationalist,” a “mouthpiece for the extreme right,” and insinuated that that we are motivated by a “racist” agenda of a state “without Arab citizens” or one in which “those citizens docilely accept second-class status.”

Every allegation is unfounded; if NIF leaders would sit down with us they would see the falsity in these dubious claims.

Another particularly egregious error in the op-ed was the allegation that NGO Monitor has “opine[d] that it should be illegal for Adalah and other NGOs to receive funding from democracies abroad.” This allegation from the NIF is clearly and entirely false – NGO Monitor’s position on these issues is highly visible and easily verified.

From The New York Times, to The Forward, to The Jerusalem Post, NGO Monitor has clearly stated that while we support full funding transparency, we oppose draft legislation seeking to place limits on foreign funding for political NGOs. In no case has NGO Monitor stated it should be “illegal” for Adalah or other Israeli political advocacy NGOs to receive funding from “democracies abroad.”

As part of this campaign, NIF has developed an imaginary image of Adalah designed to validate continued funding, regardless of the facts. Daniel Skoatch, NIF’s executive director, recently told NIF funders and supporters that Adalah is “Israel’s leading Arab-Israeli civil rights organization and an NIF grantee.” This and other NIF statements whitewash Adalah calls for governments to “re-evaluate their relationship with Israel,” and erase the words of Adalah’s general director, Hassan Jabareen, urging activists “to highlight the inherent undemocratic state” and to “use that as part of campaigning internationally.”

As NIF's record of mistakes and embarrassments grows, the hysterical efforts to blame the messengers have worn thin. The same tactics were used when, in 2004, we publicized NIF's fellowship award to Shamaï Leibowitz, who promoted BDS in the US, among other activities inconsistent with NIF's declared objectives. NIF also lashed out at a whistleblower who protested that some of its Israeli activists "want to annihilate the State without ruling out violent means, who believe that the State of Israel was born out of sin and who apologize for its existence, who loathe Israel and its symbols... who devote their lives and efforts towards turning Israel into a bi- or multi-national country... They also equate Israel's actions with those of Nazi Germany."

The recent Wikileaks embarrassment – in which NIF's associate director in Israel at the time told US Embassy officials "that she believed that in 100 years Israel would be majority Arab and that the disappearance of a Jewish state would not be the tragedy that Israelis fear since it would become more democratic" – is the clearest evidence that key NIF decision-makers are pursuing agendas unaligned with the organization's mission and principles.

This mistaken appointment led directly to funding of groups which are centrally involved in the BDS campaigns, such as the Coalition of Women for Peace. It took two years for NIF to finally end this funding, only after repeated attacks against NGO Monitor and our research exposing the details.

There are numerous other examples, from grantee activities to rhetoric from NIF officials, which further affirm the simple point that a major problem exists. It may be easier for NIF to present the situation as "NGO Monitor vs. NIF," but this is disingenuous. NGO Monitor is not against NIF. Our task is to help funders for this and other organizations by providing checks and balances against the abuse of power, and ensuring that moral guidelines are upheld.

Instead of lashing out in panic, NIF officials should end their polarizing discourse, agree to a constructive dialogue with NGO Monitor, and work together to promote a vibrant and justice-based society based on the twin pillars of Zionism and democracy.

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