

**NGO Monitor translation of MP Christian Imark's speech at the Swiss lower house of parliament prior to the vote on a bill that would halt public funding to organizations that promote racism, antisemitism, hate speech and BDS on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2017.**

Mrs. President, Federal Councilor, ladies and gentlemen. I would now like to explain to you the reasons behind this motion. We have tried many times, with parliamentary questions and written correspondence, to elicit an explanation from the Swiss government and the corresponding departments for the concrete allegations and facts presented. But until now, unfortunately, we are without success.

For example, Switzerland funds the NGOs BADIL, Addameer, Al-Haq, Al Mezan, Breaking the Silence, the Gaza Community Mental Health Program, Adalah, Zochrot, and Social TV, with several millions of Swiss Francs, directly or indirectly. These are organizations that carry out and promote boycott and sanctions against Israel, that lead anti-Israel propaganda, legal warfare, anti-Zionist and racist campaigns, that call for the abolishment of the State of Israel, or even have direct ties to terrorist organizations.

Forgive me please, Federal Council, but in response to all of these concrete allegations you could not until now provide assurance that they are not true, or that you intend to reconsider Switzerland's support of these organizations. I have conducted several conversations, among them those with high-ranked Israeli officials, but also those with simple citizens from Israel - they have all confirmed to me that Switzerland's dealings with NGOs are perceived as a one-sided partisan obsession concerning the Middle East conflict - by some they are even considered a provocation.

Swiss foreign policy is not credible if it supports organizations that don't recognize - and even boycott - the existence, the sovereignty, and the democracy of the State of Israel. All of us who are gathered here are accountable to Swiss citizens, and to no other people or entity in the world. We have the duty to make clear to our taxpayers why a part of their hard-earned income should be allocated for international peace-building efforts. We have the responsibility to make sure that this money will *really* be used for peace. And that this peace-building is credible, and recognized by *all sides*.

Legal arguments are often used in this conflict. But no-one seems to ask what referendum, or what democratically legitimate mechanism gives us the right for such undertakings. Even if boycott activities and propaganda against a sovereign state are not explicitly unlawful, we must, in our independent and neutral position, ask ourselves in earnest whether we can and want to facilitate the support of such actions. I myself do not pretend to be able to serve a solution to the Middle East conflict on a silver platter. The present motion does not, under any circumstances, wish to prevent Switzerland from deploying taxpayers' money in order to actively promote peace – quite the contrary. If there is will on both sides to find peace, so that nations and people in the future will be able to live in peace, then Switzerland should do its share.

It is in Switzerland's highest interest that partners for international cooperation be chosen with care and be regularly monitored. How can someone disapprove of barring partners that are racist, antisemitic or inciting. No-one understands this.

Switzerland does not only have a great responsibility to its taxpayers, but it also has a responsibility as a neutral country. If our country partakes in one-sided foreign policy, we will never achieve peace, on the contrary - we will only fan the flames of the conflict until blood will be on our own hands. I see in this conflict on the one hand people who have no perspective, and are doomed for this reason to live in a prison of their own making. And on the other hand, I see people who fear for their own lives and for the lives of those they hold dear on a daily basis.

I believe this conflict can be solved neither by legal, nor by religious or historical arguments. I believe what is needed is simply people who wish unconditionally to live in liberty and peace – all the more reason that Switzerland, as an independent and neutral country, should make sure that we work with people who hold this wish and not with people who invest their energy in hate and destruction. For these reasons it is important that Switzerland choose its partners with care, many thanks for your support.