



Justice

THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
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In this issue

War in Lebanon

30 years of pursuing peace

Law of armed conflict

The UN's distorted looking glass

Watching the watchers

The courts

Family reunification during war

Balancing civil liberties and security

Human rights in a constitutional
framework

France

SNCF: Guilty of WWII deportations?

More than 80 Hizbollah missiles hit Tiberias
and the Sea of Galilee region last summer

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More than 80 missiles hit Tiberias and the Sea of Galilee region during Hezbollah's assault on Israel last summer.

Photo: Israel Government Press Office

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Contents

President's Message	2
Do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with thy God	3
<i>Ruth Bader Ginsburg</i>	
Lebanon	
In pursuit of peace with Lebanon	7
<i>Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center</i>	
War in Lebanon, the law of armed conflict and the UN Security Council	13
<i>Robbie Sabel</i>	
Israel's asymmetric wars: Through the UN looking glass, dark and distorted	18
<i>Michla Pomerance</i>	
Watching the watchers	24
<i>Gerald M. Steinberg and Sarah Mandel</i>	
Supreme Court Judgment: Israel or Utopia?	28
Family reunification in a time of war	
<i>Rahel Rimon</i>	
The role of contemporary courts in reviewing security measures	37
<i>Galit Ragan</i>	
The role of the SNCF under occupation: guilty or not guilty?	42
<i>Joseph Roubache</i>	
Human rights in a constitutional framework	44
<i>Daniel Sinclair</i>	

Watching the watchers

Under the guise of promoting universal human rights, many non-governmental organizations exploit their position of trust among governments, the media, academics and the public to promote a strongly anti-Israel agenda while paying little heed to egregious human rights violations in other parts of the world. NGO Monitor is attempting to right these wrongs.

Gerald M. Steinberg and Sarah Mandel

The Palestinian terror campaign and war with Hezbollah have been accompanied by a parallel political campaign designed to label Israeli defensive actions as “war crimes,” “excessive use of force,” and “violations of international law.” In this massive use of “soft power,” the main combat troops are members of groups claiming to promote human rights or humanitarian assistance, known as non-governmental organizations or NGOs. Their weapons, including glossy reports, press conferences, and mass emails focus on demonization of Israel, while erasing Palestinian terror. These attacks are funded by European governments, and wealthy “charities,” including Christian Aid, the U.S.-based Ford Foundation and, in some cases, the New Israel Fund.

The impact of these NGOs is magnified by a “halo effect” that ensures that their reports and statements are routinely accepted at face value and without question by journalists, diplomats, academics and others. The “halo effect” is based, in large part, on the historical development of human rights norms, including the post-Holocaust conventions and treaties, such as the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The emphasis on these norms has grown continuously, and, as Irwin Cotler, a member of the Canadian parliament and a professor of law at McGill University, has noted, human rights now constitutes the new secular religion, with NGOs exceeding the UN as defenders of this creed. These NGOs claim to have formed a “civil society” – an alternative to the prevailing “selfish and particularist interests” of states, governments, (including democracies), multinational corporations and political parties. As such, NGOs are often portrayed and present themselves as altruistic, promoting the common good, while business and political organizations are perceived as selfish and particularistic.

In reality NGO agendas are often highly politicized, and they regularly distort human rights norms to promote an extreme and biased perspective of conflict that conforms to their post-colonial ideology. This is particularly the case in their demonization of Israel.

The latest political attack came in the wake of Israel’s response to Hezbollah’s attack on Israel on 12 July 2006, and the war in Lebanon that followed. In the first three weeks of this conflict 19 NGOs, including major international players such as Human Rights Watch (hereinafter “HRW”) and Amnesty International (hereinafter “Amnesty”), issued a total of 94 reports condemning Israel for “war crimes” and “disproportionate use of force.” These NGOs deliberately distorted events and erased the context when they called on both Israel and Hezbollah to “avoid targeting civilians.” They joined the bandwagon condemning Israel’s “massacre” at Qana, relying on local “eye witnesses” who claimed that no Hezbollah attacks occurred from the area or that Hezbollah fighters were in the area. And HRW’s condemnation of Israel for the “slaughter” of civilians at Srifa stated that no Hezbollah fighters were present in the village, despite clear evidence to the contrary.¹

Later, a few token statements labeling Hezbollah’s deliberate targeting of civilians as a war crime constituted a belated attempt at balance, but they were far outweighed by the level of resources devoted to attacking Israel’s defensive measures. HRW’s calls for an “international investigation” were focused exclusively on Israel’s military actions, and the one-sided condemnations of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) were repeated by the UN Human Rights Council in August 2006. (Amnesty International’s 15-page report on Hezbollah’s “war crimes,” not including the use of human shields, while far more substantive than the HRW statements, was published in September, after the media and diplomatic focus had shifted to other issues.²)

This political campaign followed the June 2006 incident when Israel was blamed for the deaths of eight



Palestinians in a mysterious explosion on a Gaza beach. The Palestinian version of events, which included fabricated videos and many contradictions, was supported and promoted by HRW officials who came to Gaza, organized a major press conference, and declared that Israel was responsible for the incident. Boosted by HRW's massive public relations machine (supported by an annual budget of over \$50 million), their words were immediately repeated in the media around the world, with no independent confirmation or analysis. HRW's reports, press releases and other activities on this incident simply ignored the counter-evidence from other sources, including the IDF and Israeli hospitals (where some of the injured Palestinians were being treated) and, as always, demanded an "international investigation" to find Israel guilty.

Following the standard pattern, other powerful NGOs joined the chorus, including Amnesty, as well as numerous Palestinian groups. None of these groups that claim to promote human rights, including HRW and Amnesty, issued reports on the barrage of Palestinian missiles that were launched against Sderot and other Israeli towns since the withdrawal from Gaza. The same pattern was followed in the case of Lebanon. Under the double standards of NGOs, terror attacks against Israelis are rarely classified as human rights violations, while Israeli self-defense actions are almost automatically labeled "war crimes" and "violations of international law."

NGOs and the Durban strategy

The central role of NGOs in the demonization of Israel was emphasized at the UN Conference on Racism that took place in Durban, South Africa, in early September 2001. The major participants in the NGO Forum included Miftah (an NGO established by Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO] spokeswoman Hanan Ashwari), and the Palestinian Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (also known as LAW), which received over \$1 million from the Ford Foundation, as well as funding from the European Union and over 30 additional sponsors. Miftah and LAW led representatives of 1,500 NGOs, including HRW and Amnesty, (despite their subsequent cover-up efforts) to adopt a declaration that labeled Israel a "racist apartheid state" guilty of "genocide," called for an end to its "racist crimes" against Palestinians," and endorsed an international war crimes tribunal to try Israeli citizens. There were no references to Palestinian terror or their use of human shields in densely-populated areas to hide weapons.

On this basis, the participants agreed to "a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid

state...the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes, the full cessation of all links (diplomatic, economic, social, aid, military cooperation and training) between all states and Israel,"³ i.e., a strategy of de-legitimizing Israel as "an apartheid regime," through international isolation based on the South African model.

Working closely with the Palestinian leadership, the Arab and Islamic governments, and supporters in Europe and elsewhere, the NGOs provide the platform, funds and political slogans that continue to drive this strategy. In 2002, following terror attacks such as the Passover Eve massacre at Netanya's Park Hotel, and the consequent Israeli military response, officials from Amnesty and other NGOs were quick to repeat Palestinian claims of a "massacre" in Jenin. These NGO officials, many of whom are obsessed with Israel, continue to refer falsely to Israeli "war crimes" and are also the leaders of the effort to attack the security fence by using the term "apartheid wall." NGOs that claim to promote universal human rights focus far more on condemnations of Israel, while giving relatively little attention to abuses in Libya, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran and Sudan. In 2004, for example, a detailed study by NGO Monitor demonstrated that HRW devoted one-third of its activities on allegations of human rights violations in the Middle East to condemnations of Israel.

NGO support for academic boycotts and divestment

The NGO network is also very active in the anti-Israel academic boycott and church divestment campaigns, particularly in the U.K. and Europe. International and Palestinian NGOs provide the language of these resolutions and speeches. In the U.K., for example, officials of Christian Aid such as Lord (Bishop) Gladwin and the Rev. Stephen Sizer are closely aligned with an NGO known as Sabeel, headed by a radical Palestinian (Naim Ateek). Ateek uses blatant anti-Semitic language in his attacks on Israel, referring, for example, to the "Israeli crucifixion system operating daily [against the Palestinians]." To claim legitimacy, Ateek often appears with an extremist Israeli, Jeff Halper, whose NGO, known as the Israel Committee Against House Demolition (hereinafter "ICAHD"), is funded by the EU. ICAHD uses demonization terms such as Israel's "state terrorism," and actively promotes apartheid rhetoric.

Similarly, Christian Aid made anti-Israel campaigns the center of its fund raising and public relations efforts in Britain during the Christmas periods of 2003 and 2004. The 2004 "Child of Bethlehem" program, featuring a photograph of a wounded Palestinian child, and no

mention of terror attacks against Israel, played on clear anti-Jewish themes and motifs. Such activities created the fertile background for the academic boycott votes of the university faculty unions, and for the church divestment efforts focusing on rhetoric that portrays Israel as racist, apartheid, and guilty of war crimes. Both tactics are core elements in the Durban process and the political war to destroy Israel as a sovereign Jewish state.

There are dozens of other very active anti-Israel NGOs operating throughout Europe, perpetuating the myth of neutral “civil society.” In Belgium, the local branch of Oxfam, which was headed for many years by a radical socialist named Pierre Galand, distributed an anti-Semitic poster in 2003 based on the theme of the blood libel, in promoting the campaign to boycott Israeli goods and Israelis themselves. Galand, now a member of the Belgian Senate, uses his influence and access to promote the activities of the European Chairman of the Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (also known as ECCP), based in Brussels. Galand is a frequent speaker at UN conferences that attack Israel, under the auspices of the UN Committee on “the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People.” He is also President of the Forum des Peuples, a leader of the Belgo-Palestinian Association and plays a leadership role in many other radical Belgian and European NGOs.

Another European NGO, the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, has become a platform for its extremist Palestinian members. Despite claiming to “concern itself with the whole of the Euro-Mediterranean region,” this group has published no reports on human rights abuses in the Palestinian Authority or by terrorist groups. Its focus is on attacking Israel for “collective punishment” and “violations of international law,” following the lead of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights and al-Mezan.

Funding for radical NGOs

This radical NGO activity and demonization could not take place without a great deal of money, including the generous funding provided by governments (particularly Europe and Canada). Many pro-Palestinian NGOs are able to promote their agendas under the frameworks of development support, human rights (via the European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights and the Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Network, also known as EMHRN), and peace advocacy. Funding for Miftah, HaMoked, the Arab Association for Human Rights, B'tselem, Physicians for Human Rights—Israel and dozens more gives these groups access to the media, diplomats (including direct involvement in UN discussions) and other public relations channels. Hundreds of

pro-Palestinian NGOs, linked together in associations such as the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), and closely tied to the PLO political leadership, have formed partnerships with the global NGOs.

In addition, the money provided by charities and philanthropies adds more weapons to the NGO war against Israel. The Ford Foundation, with an annual budget of half a billion dollars per year, paid for many of the NGO officials who traveled to the 2001 Durban conference. Later, after the U.S. Congress investigated this abuse of charitable funds for promoting the destruction of Israel, the president of Ford pledged to end this funding. But implementation of these guidelines is slow, not transparent, and most of these NGOs continue to receive money. Miftah, for example, received \$250,000 from the Ford Foundation in 2005, and al-Mezan received \$150,000 – and both are key promoters of the Durban strategy. In addition, the Ford Foundation transferred \$20 million to the New Israel Fund, which itself has been involved in supporting anti-Israel NGOs (such as Arab Human Rights Association, HaMoked, and Ilam) under the false flag of civil rights in Israel. The New Israel Fund gives fellowships to academics such as Shamaï Leibowitz to promote divestment and the rhetoric of “apartheid,” and has continued to allow donations via its charitable status to groups such as ICAHD.

Watching the watchers

These activities and the role of funders have been carried out in secret and without analysis. As a result of the “halo effect,” journalists and academics rarely question the interests and biases of NGOs and their officials who claim to promote human rights, peace and development. But this is beginning to change, and the NGO Monitor project has brought this activity out of the shadows.

One of NGO Monitor’s central objectives is to engage with and encourage different behavior among NGOs, many of which perform positive humanitarian or human rights functions in parallel to anti-Israel demonization and promotion of the Durban strategy. In this process, NGO Monitor faces a number of challenges, not least the attempts by officials of powerful NGOs to dismiss detailed and source-based research as innately biased. HRW officials, such as its executive director Kenneth Roth, have demonstrated their contempt for accountability by engaging in virulent personal attacks against NGO Monitor, and the international headquarters of Amnesty International ordered the heads of the Israel branch not to participate in an NGO Monitor conference in June 2006. Yet these responses in themselves represent progress towards dialogue, and in some cases have already brought significant change. Following detailed

reports published by NGO Monitor, some European Union officials have begun to investigate the role of EU-funded NGOs such as ICAHD and the EMHRN in promoting anti-Israel propaganda. (NGO Monitor has initiated a research project to investigate the degree to which support for such political NGOs violates the EU's guidelines and legal requirements.)

A further challenge is the reluctance of journalists to realize the endemic NGO bias that is shaping international views of Israel. The "halo effect" that has frequently protected reports and claims of NGOs from independent investigation and questioning remains strong. However, an increasing number of researchers and journalists have begun to cite NGO Monitor's reports, and have begun to question NGO claims, particularly the unverifiable use of eye-witnesses. A series of press articles and op-ed pieces in July and August 2006 and published in a wide range of newspapers focused on these biases.⁴

As a result of NGO Monitor's detailed research on over 100 NGOs, all of which is available on the internet, critical debate is developing about the role and funding of NGOs. NGO Monitor has found that the greatest impact can be achieved by presenting donors with details of their recipients' activities, and a number of meetings with supporters of HRW have taken place. NGO Monitor is also actively documenting the implementation of the Ford Foundation guidelines for funding NGOs, issued in the wake of the investigation of the abuses in the 2001 Durban Conference. These analyses have been cited in press reports and in January 2006, NGO Monitor's letter to Susan Berresford, president of the Ford Foundation, regarding funding for a proposed conference on the academic boycott of Israel, led to the cancellation of this event. NGO Monitor has also been contacted with requests for information by individual donors and groups who have learned that their contributions to local United Jewish Appeal campaigns ultimately funded anti-Israel NGOs, and who are therefore now working to change the funding priorities of their local chapters.

In the U.K., Christian Aid has responded to NGO Monitor analyses of its highly unbalanced and politicized approach to the Arab-Israeli conflict by meeting with Sir Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, in order to prevent repetition of "past controversies" including the "Child of Bethlehem" campaign. This has not yet resulted in significant improvement in the group's approach, but it has opened lines of communication. Setting an important precedent, the U.K. Charities Commission has warned War on Want (a virulent anti-Israel "human rights" group) that its activities are inconsistent with the commission's licensing requirements.

At the UN, NGO Monitor reports have been introduced in discussions involving applications by Palestinian human rights NGOs for status in the UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). As a result of the report on BADIL, the Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugees' Rights, the application of this NGO was delayed in 2005, and led to protests from European and American delegations in 2006. In addition, in the European Parliament, MEP Paul van Buitenen asked the European Commission to justify the funding for political NGOs, not only with regard to the Palestinian groups, but more widely as well. Furthermore, NGO Monitor has initiated a discussion with the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor of the U.S. Department of State on the use of NGO sources that lack credibility and are politically biased in compiling the annual country reports on the status of human rights. The 2005 report revealed the impact of NGO Monitor: a reduced reliance on NGOs for information on human rights. But politically biased NGOs are still cited and there is need for continued analysis and discussion regarding future reports.

These developments are only the first steps in providing transparency and independent evaluation of the political agendas pursued by human rights NGOs. In order to halt the cynical exploitation of human rights and international law to promote the demonization of Israel, the debate on the leading role of NGOs and the civil society groups in the Durban strategy must expand. Journalists, diplomats and academics must be pressed to investigate NGO claims and biases, and end the abuse of the rhetoric of human rights for this incitement. The era of the "halo effect" must be brought to an end, while legitimate activities that are shown to actually promote universal human rights, including in Libya, Sudan, and Saudi Arabia, should be encouraged and promoted.

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Notes:

1. A. Bell, "Whose War crimes in Lebanon," *Jerusalem Post*, 22 August 2006. See <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?apage=1&cid=1154525925700&page-name=JPost%2FJPArticle%2FShowFull>

See *Watchers*, page 47

צדק

ENGLISH: 1. justness, correctness. 2. righteousness, justice. 3. salvation. 4. deliverance, victory.
[**ARAMAIC:** צדק (he was righteous), **SYRIAC:** זדק (it is right), **UGARITIC:** ṣdq (= reliability, virtue), **ARABIC:** ṣadaqa (= he spoke the truth), **ETHIOPIIC:** ṣadaqa (= he was just, righteous)] Derivatives:
צדקה **POST-BIBLICAL HEBREW:** alms, charity. Cp. **ARAMAIC** צדקתה (= justice). **PALMYRENE** צדקתה (= it is right).
צדק 1. just, righteous. 2. pious.

After Ernest Klein, A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English. 1987: Carta/University of Haifa

Justice is one of the goals of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists. Thus, the Association works to advance human rights everywhere, addressing in particular issues of concern to the Jewish people through its commitment to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Holocaust denial and negation of the State of Israel.

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