

NGO Monitor's submission to the Parliamentary Committee against Antisemitism

Antisemitism Inquiry
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NGO Monitor was founded to promote critical debate and accountability of organizations that claim to promote human rights and humanitarian assistance in the Arab-Israeli conflict zone. Our objective is to write analyses and reports on the activities of the NGO community, for the benefit of policy makers, journalists, philanthropic organizations and the general public. NGO Monitor has over 7300 subscribers to its weekly reports and monthly digests, and averages over 5000 daily visits on its website.

NGO Monitor's objective is to end the practice of certain NGOs that exploit the language of universal human rights to promote politically and ideologically motivated anti-Israel and at times anti-Semitic agendas. These agendas were articulated by the NGO network at the 2001 Durban conference¹, and continue to be pursued widely, with the goal of delegitimizing Israel and the right of the Jewish people to sovereign equality. Among the themes that are often used is the fundamental immoral comparison between Israeli self-defense against terror and the actions of the Nazis during the Holocaust. The NGO Declaration at the Durban Conference accused Israel of "ethnic cleansing" and "acts of genocide," and advocated a "policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state." These themes are highly offensive and embody post-Holocaust antisemitism that denies the Jewish people sovereign equality on a par with other nations, and rejects Israel's right to defend its citizens against terrorism.²

NGO Monitor (www.ngo-monitor.org) has compiled this report specifically for the Parliamentary Committee against Antisemitism, although all the information presented is available in different forms on the NGO Monitor website.

Report on the Activities of NGOs based in the UK

This report will cover British NGOs that are active in relation to the Arab-Israeli conflict, consistent with the remit of NGO Monitor, including War on Want, Christian Aid (including links to UK Friends of Sabeel), and Amnesty International.

The activities of these NGOs include:

- excessive and disproportionate condemnation of Israeli policies, resulting in demonization of the Jewish state (including support for boycotts and divestment in the framework of the “Durban programme”);
- frequent use of Holocaust themes and rhetoric that compares Israelis to Nazis
- non-universal application of human rights claims, meaning that Israel is held to very different criteria in comparison with other countries in similar security situations;
- failing to consider the violation of the human rights of the Jewish population (specifically in the form of terrorism);
- an indifference to or rejection of Israel’s legitimate right to defend itself;
- the use of classical antisemitic themes to condemn Israel.

War on Want

The UK registered Charity, War on Want (WoW)³, claims to “fight global poverty”, whilst conducting an ongoing political campaign to demonize the State of Israel, undermine its right to self defence and label it a “Nazi” state. The use of Holocaust related themes to condemn Israeli anti-terror policies is particularly offensive, going beyond a lack of knowledge or extreme insensitivity.

As demonstrated in NGO Monitor analyses⁴, War on Want routinely uses rhetoric such as “apartheid” and “slavery” to demonize Israel, accuses Israeli leaders of attempting to “simulate the aftermath of a natural disaster” for Palestinians, acting like “a heavyweight beating a child”, and similar inflammatory references. War on Want uses traditional antisemitic libels, such as “poisoning the wells”, in repeating allegations (without independent verification) that the Israel Defense Forces target Palestinian water sources “as a form of collective punishment”.

War on Want's 2004-5 campaign against Israel focused on the security barrier, which it calls “the world's biggest prison”. The result is to reinforce the campaign designed to create an image of Israel as a systematic violator of human rights and an illegitimate state. In this and other activities that promote anti-Israel demonization that goes far beyond criticism of Israeli policies, War on Want repeats the messages of extremist NGOs, such as the Democracy and Workers' Rights Center, the Union of Palestinian Medical Relief Committees⁵ (UPMRC), PNGO⁶, BADIL⁷, Electronic Intifada, www.stopthewall.org, etc.

WoW's repeats one-sided allegations that Israel's security barrier is dividing Palestinian land "into ghettos" (another example of the use of Holocaust related terms to attack Israel). Other false allegations include electrification of the barrier, "with watchtowers and sniper positions every few hundred metres." In several instances their website unsettlingly features a photo of a Swastika inside the Star of David, reflecting the fundamentally immoral comparison of Israeli self-defense with the actions of the Nazis during the Holocaust. In a similar assault, WoW blames Israel for a lack of sufficient healthcare facilities in Palestinian towns, proclaiming that "the Wall is part of an on-going attempt to make life unendurable for Palestinians."

Highlighting its abuse of its status as a registered charity, War on Want consistently acts as if the concept of human rights does not apply to Israelis, and its political campaigns make no mention of the terrorism that has killed over 1000 Israelis (mostly civilians), and which provides the moral rationale of this defensive response. Distorting the historical record of rejectionism and warfare, WoW justifies terror and brutality, claiming that the violence "is a result of Palestinian anger and desperation at the situation they have suffered." In WoW's distorted narrative, Israel alone is to blame for the "seemingly endless downward spiral of violence".

WoW is also involved in promoting the boycott of Israel, which is a central part of the Durban agenda of delegitimization designed to undermine the legitimacy of Israel. It has launched a public relations campaign calling for the suspension of the Israel-EU trade agreement and Chief Executive Louise Richards maintained that failing to introduce sanctions against Israel would be seen "as a betrayal of the Palestinian people." In its report on Caterpillar, the charity claimed that the company's "armed bulldozers have been responsible for the destruction of thousands of Palestinian homes, schools, wells and olive groves." Once again, there is no mention of terrorism.

Christian Aid's "Child of Bethlehem" Appeal

Christian Aid is a very powerful charity, whose humanitarian work often provides vitally necessary assistance. However, its otherwise praiseworthy activity is marred by extensive involvement in anti-Israel political campaigns (including divestment and boycotts). Disproportionate attacks on Israeli policy reflect double standards that are inconsistent with the concept of universal human rights. Christian Aid's rhetoric displays a deep hostility towards Israel, blaming the Jewish State entirely and highly inaccurately for Palestinian suffering, while failing to mention terrorism and the legitimacy of security measures to ensure the human rights of Israelis (See NGO Monitor's detailed reports on CA's activities and campaigns for more detailed examples⁸).

Drawing upon powerful Christian imagery and symbolism, in December 2004, Christian Aid headlined its Christmas appeal "Child of Bethlehem".⁹ This campaign focused on the story of a seven-year old Palestinian girl living in Bethlehem who was allegedly "hit in the eye by shrapnel from a bullet fired by Israeli soldiers."

While Christian Aid operates in over 50 countries, it chose to headline this particular case for its Christmas appeal, triggering the emotions that images of a child from Bethlehem conjure

among Christians during the Christmas period. In this campaign, Christian Aid has linked the suffering of Palestinian Christian children with that of Jesus, who was born in Bethlehem, and to centuries of blood libels against the Jewish people.

Christian Aid distributed an 18-page “Child of Bethlehem” brochure¹⁰ to churches for use as a religious resource to promote this Christmas appeal. The brochure is described as containing “Worship resources which make connections between the Bethlehem of Christ's birth and the contemporary situation in the Middle East”. This campaign marked a dangerous turn in the anti-Israel activity that is being promoted widely under the guise of humanitarian assistance by including Christian religious symbolism, thus linking modern opposition to Israel to classical attacks against Jews.

As in the case of War on Want, Christian Aid's campaigns were central in promoting the anti-Israel boycotts and divestment efforts in the UK, which are, in themselves, manifestations of the rejection of sovereign equality for the Jewish people in Israel.

Christian Aid also has close links with the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center, a Palestinian NGO leading the anti-Israel divestment campaign.¹¹ Sabeel is an official partner of Christian Aid¹² and two prominent members of Christian Aid's leadership provide legitimacy and support for Sabeel's activities in the UK:¹³ Rev. John Gladwin, Bishop of Chelmsford and Chair of Christian Aid's Board of Trustees is a patron of Sabeel's UK branch and Paul Dean, another member of Christian Aid's Executive Committee, also participates in Sabeel's activities. Sabeel's leader Naim Ateek refers to Israel as an “apartheid state” and employs classical antisemitic theological themes. For example, in the 2001 Sabeel “Easter message”¹⁴: “it seems to many of us that Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him. [...] The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily.” In similar messages, such as a February 2001 sermon¹⁵, Ateek accuses Israel of killing Jesus (the Palestinians) as infant, prophet and messiah: “Israel has placed a large boulder, a big stone that has metaphorically shut off the Palestinians in a tomb. It is similar to the stone placed on the entrance of Jesus' tomb...” As a number of Jewish leaders have noted, these themes deny the “legitimate right of the Jewish people to live in their land”, and echo medieval anti-Semitic canards.”¹⁶ (Despite the use of such blatant imagery, Christian Aid continue to provide financial support, publicity and legitimacy¹⁷ to Sabeel's activities.)

Amnesty International

The frequent and disproportionate condemnations of Israel by Amnesty International (based in London) also contribute to the “Durban strategy” of demonizing Israel, as reflected in reports and condemnations based on allegations that are not verified and lack credibility. Michael Ehrlich, former chair of Israel's Amnesty branch¹⁸, has shown that the NGO lacks independent research facilities and thus relies on selected politicized NGOs for its evidence (thus predetermining its findings before even beginning). The bias that this creates was evident in Amnesty's March 2005 report on Palestinian women's rights¹⁹. This report blames Israel for intra-Palestinian violence against women, exploiting this issue in the political campaign to demonize the Jewish state, rather than providing a serious examination of gender issues in Palestinian society. For example, Israel is blamed for Palestinian domestic abuse: “Restrictions on movement and curfews which confine people to their

homes for prolonged periods, and increased unemployment, poverty and insecurity, . . . , have contributed to the increase in violence against women, including sexual abuse, within the family;”²⁰ whilst the importance of cultural elements of Palestinian society are minimized: “Palestinian women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are victims of multiple violations as a result of the escalation of the conflict, Israel's policies, and a system of norms, traditions and laws which treat women as unequal members of society.” The authors patronizingly deny Palestinian society the maturity to act responsibly, instead blaming Israeli policies without any justification.

Summary: The examples presented in this report illustrate how both classical and post-Holocaust antisemitism - taking the form of extreme vilification and deligitimization of Israel and a denial of its right to self-defense, and expressed in the vocabulary of non-universal application of human rights norms – has become manifest in some UK NGOs.

However, in conclusion, we also note recent positive developments, with recognition of excesses and a commitment to change such behaviour. According to press reports, Christian Aid officials have met with Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks to discuss “past controversies” including the “Child of Bethlehem campaign”. The charity’s leaders have pledged to “tak[e] seriously its responsibility to not cause offence to the Jewish community.” This is an important step in restoring this charity’s humanitarian role, and provides a positive example for other NGOs based in the UK.

¹ The UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was held in Durban in September 2001. For further details and extensive resources on the Durban, Conference see <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/issues/durban.htm>

² See, for example, publications of the Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism project, <http://www.jcpa.org/phas.htm>; “The Twenty-first-century Total War Against Israel and the Jews,” Manfred Gerstenfeld, *Post-Holocaust and Anti-Semitism*, No. 38, November 2005, <http://www.jcpa.org/phas/phas-38.htm>

³ <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/archives/infofile.htm#waronwant>

⁴ <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/editions/v2n11/v2n11-6.htm>

⁵ <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/archives/infofile.htm#upmrc>

⁶ <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/archives/infofile.htm#pngo>

⁷ <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/archives/infofile.htm#badil>

⁸ <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/issues/ChristianAidSummaryReport.htm>

⁹ http://www.christianaid.org.uk/christmas/worship_resources/chmag.htm

¹⁰ http://www.christianaid.org.uk/christmas/worship_resources/xmas04_wlg.pdf

¹¹ http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ChJew_31/4801_31.htm

¹² <http://www.christianaid.org.uk/world/partlinks.htm>

¹³ <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/editions/v3n11/SabeelsEcumenicalFacade.htm>

¹⁴ <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/editions/v3n11/SabeelsEcumenicalFacade.htm>

¹⁵ <http://www.sabeel.org/old/conf2001/ateekser.htm>

¹⁶ http://www.adl.org/PresRele/ChJew_31/4801_31.htm

¹⁷ http://www.christianaid.org.uk/middle_east/0208syno.htm

¹⁸ <http://www.discoverthenetworks.org/Articles/Amnesty%20International%20Do%20Your%20Homework.htm>

¹⁹ <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/editions/v3n09/AIExploitsWomensRights.htm>

²⁰ <http://web.amnesty.org/library/index/engmde150162005>