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**Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner
for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the
High Commissioner and the Secretary-General**

Written statement* submitted by Institute for NGO Research, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[23 May 2022]

* Issued as received, in the language of submission only. The views expressed in the present document do not necessarily reflect the views of the United Nations or its officials.



The European Union- and European-Government Sponsored Defamation Campaigns to Block NGO Funding Accountability

Since 2011, NGO Monitor (a project of the Institute for NGO Research) has published numerous reports, based on open sources, delineating the evidence and documenting the close connections regarding the network of Palestinian NGOs and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), a designated terrorist organization by the United States of America, EU, Canada, and Israel. NGO Monitor research has published fact-based research and independent analysis and has uncovered that the PFLP has substantial ties to at least eight European-funded Palestinian NGOs. Research shows that, in some cases, the NGOs were founded by the PFLP itself.

Crucially, staff members, founders, board members, general assembly members, and senior executives from a number of NGOs have ties to, and even senior roles, in the PFLP terror group. In addition to the NGOs with more formal connections to the PFLP, other groups regularly participate in PFLP events and/or advocate on behalf of PFLP terrorists. Some of these individuals are employed in financial positions at the NGOs, calling into question funding oversight by the European Union, the United Nations, European governments and other donors, and increasing the risk of diversion of public funds to an internationally designated terrorist group.

In August 2021, it was revealed that the EU's anti-fraud mechanism, OLAF, launched a terror-financing investigation into EU support for Palestinian NGOs. This follows a July 2020 decision by the Dutch government to suspend funding to one of the six NGOs in which several employees were arrested and are currently standing trial for the murder of a 17-year old Israeli girl. The Dutch government announced in January 2022 that this funding was terminated following an investigation identifying at least 34 individuals who held concurrent positions within the PFLP terror group and the NGO.

Additionally, in May 2020, EU Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi stated that he had instructed the heads of the EU delegations to Israel and the West Bank/ Gaza to "look deep[ly]" into allegations that some EU funds go to terror-linked or terror-supporting NGOs, declaring that such funding "will not be tolerated."

Likewise, multiple financial institutions previously closed accounts and denied payment services to these NGOs. In 2018, Citibank and Arab Bank closed an account belonging to a NGO with ties to the PFLP, and Visa, Mastercard, and American Express have also shut down online credit card donations to some of these NGOs.

However, while some countries have demonstrated the need to take these claims of terror funding seriously, some European diplomats, international NGOs, and UN officials have defamed and threatened NGO Monitor, and other organizations, attempting to intimidate and muzzle the organization from exposing this abuse of taxpayer funding. Many of the defamatory attacks on NGO Monitor have been funded by the EU- and several European governments.

For example In August 2018, just before Swedish national elections and following a series of articles critical of Swedish aid policies, OmVärlden, an online magazine owned by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA, the branch of the government responsible for international development aid), published an excessive number of articles (23 in total) attacking NGO Monitor. These government-sponsored articles not only included false and defamatory claims about NGO Monitor, but included antisemitic imagery and conspiracy theories.

In April 2021, the European Union, France, Switzerland, Finland, and the Canton of Geneva funded a publication accusing NGO Monitor (among others) of "smearing" and "defaming" terror-linked and other anti-Israel groups. It also made accusations of NGO Monitor being an arm of the Israeli government. The authors of the report also created a dedicated website repeating the content of the report. Falsely accusing Jewish and Israeli NGOs of being agents of the Israeli government has a long and dark history dating back to at least the 1970s as part of antisemitic Soviet and Arab propaganda campaigns aimed at efforts to expel Israel from

the UN. It is shameful that self-proclaimed human rights NGOs are perpetuating this discriminatory history using EU and European government funding.

This reprisals campaign against NGO Monitor has only been ramped up following the Israeli government decision in October 2022 to designate six Palestinian NGOs as terrorist organizations based on detailed evidence that they are operated by and for the benefit of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

On October 31, 2021, for instance, PLO-associated labor unions declared NGO Monitor a “terrorist organization.”

In April 2022, the European Union published a call for proposals for NGO projects totaling 2.8 million euros in the West Bank and Gaza. The main focus of the call “will be on different thematic priorities: Supporting human rights defenders; [and] fighting violations including defamation/smear campaigns.” Rather than investigating claims of misuse of funding or NGOs with links to Palestinian terrorist organizations, the EU is now overtly funding NGOs to defame critics of EU NGO funding policies and to specifically target and silence organizations that call for accountability, transparency, and universal human rights.

Freedom of information and transparency relating to humanitarian aid and government activities and expenditures is the hallmark of good governance and essential to democracy. Organizations that publish and analyze such information are critical to a functional civil society and should be welcomed. They should not be subject to reprisals, including government-funded harassment and defamation campaigns, by international donors, government actors, and terror affiliates who want to keep their funding and activities hidden from public scrutiny and accountability.
