
The Centrality of NGOs in The Durban Strategy

by Gerald M. Steinberg

In the past fifty years, NGOs (non-governmental organizations) focusing on human rights issues have become highly influential actors in international politics in general, and in the Arab-Israeli conflict in particular. The NGO community constitutes a wealthy and powerful network that has propelled the anti-Israeli agenda in international frameworks such as the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHCHR) and the 2001 UN Conference against Racism, held in Durban. These NGOs have played a central role in the false charges of “massacre” and “war crimes” during the Israeli military’s anti-terror operation in Jenin (Defensive Shield) in April 2002, the portrayal of Israel’s separation barrier as “the apartheid wall,” and the promotion of academic boycotts and divestment. Their reports, press releases, and political lobbying campaigns constitute a powerful source of “soft power,”¹ and they have a powerful influence in the United Nations, the media, and academia.

Appropriating the rhetoric of universal human rights to pursue narrow political and ideological goals, and protected by a “halo effect,” the NGO community has also largely avoided analysis and accountability for its actions.² The “halo effect” is the term used to refer to the degree to which reports and statements made by prominent NGOs are

routinely accepted at face value and without question by journalists, diplomats, academics and others, who act as force multipliers for the NGO agendas.³

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 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, both of which were adopted in 1948.⁴ The emphasis on these norms has grown continuously, and, as Irwin Cotler has noted, human rights now constitutes the new secular religion.⁵ As a result, the institutional embodiment of human rights practices has extended from the United Nations and individual governments to non-governmental organizations.

The tens of thousands of NGOs around the world that have developed on this basis claim to represent *civil society* — a highly amorphous concept, generally understood to embody 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

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and present themselves as altruistic, promoting the common good, while business and political organizations are perceived as selfish and particularistic.⁶ In this spirit, the causes espoused by these NGOs cover a wide spectrum, including environmental objectives, disarmament, gender equality, human rights, the elimination of poverty, etc.

The most powerful NGOs — such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ), Christian Aid, and others — exert immense influence in the United Nations, the European Union, and Western capitals. In 1948, sixty-nine NGOs had consultative status at the United Nations; by 2000 the number was over two thousand, many of which claimed to promote “universal human rights” in their mission statements.⁷ For example, Amnesty International explicitly states that it “does not support or oppose any government or political system. ...it is concerned solely with the impartial protection of human rights.” Similarly, HRW pledges to uphold objectivity and condemn human rights abuses on all sides. In reality, as demonstrated in this article, both NGOs display strong anti-Israel and pro-Palestinian biases.

Much of this growth took place in the context of the Cold War, particularly during the 1970s. Groups such as Amnesty International and Helsinki Watch (which later became Human Rights Watch) were instrumental in the Helsinki process and the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). They actively protested the situation of political prisoners, and the denial of human rights to Jews in the Soviet Union and the Communist countries of Eastern Europe, including the denial of the right to emigrate.

By the mid-1980s these organizations were very powerful international actors, but a few years later, with the coming of glasnost, perestroika, and the end of the Cold War, they needed to find new missions to justify their continued existence and importance. Many discovered the Middle East, and the Israeli-Arab conflict in particular, to be a good venue for maintaining and even increasing their influence. In this period, the ideology of post-colonialism became increasingly dominant in the NGO community, in concert with much of the media, academic, and diplomatic networks. This ideology, articulated by Noam Chomsky and many others, assigns virtue to chosen “victims” and condemns others, including the US and Israel, as neocolonialist aggressors and “hegemons.”⁸

The link between radical politics and NGOs is illustrated in the example of Pierre Galand, a Socialist senator in Belgium and a leading member of the NGO network that propels this agenda in Europe and the United Nations. Galand gained public visibility while heading Oxfam Belgium for three decades⁹ (Oxfam is a powerful NGO confederation providing

humanitarian aid while often espousing a distinct political agenda and ideology). In 2003, Oxfam Belgium produced an anti-Israel poster based on the theme of the blood libel, which was later withdrawn following intense criticism.¹⁰ Galand continues to be involved in many different political NGOs, and is the European chairman of the Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ECCP), a Brussels-based association of NGOs cooperating with the UN Committee on the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. He is also president of the Forum des Peuples (People’s Forum NGO) and the Belgo-Palestinian Association.

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Similarly, New York-based Human Rights Watch is headed by Kenneth Roth, a former prosecutor whose rhetoric often reflects the post-nationalist and post-colonialist ideology. Under Roth's leadership, HRW devoted a highly disproportionate percentage of its resources, reflected in numerous statements and activities, to condemnations of Israel, in which the context of terrorism was all but erased.¹¹ This excessive (or obsessive) focus on Israel also reflects the ideologies of Roth's inner circle at HRW, which includes a number of individuals with radical political backgrounds. This group includes Sarah Whitson, Joe Stork, who was the editor of the strongly anti-Israel Middle East Report (MERIP), and Reed Brody, who led the HRW delegation at the Durban conference, and was active in promoting the attempt to bring Prime Minister Sharon to trial in Belgium. In addition, Lucy Meir, who was hired in 2005 as a researcher for Israel and the West Bank, had previously been affiliated with the radical Electronic Intifada website.¹² For this group, and many others, NGOs that claim to promote human rights and international law are an effective vehicle for gaining influence and promoting the radical political objectives while avoiding democratic processes and accountability.

The close links between radical politics and the NGO community that developed over the past three decades is most salient with respect to the exploitation of the language of universal human rights to promote the particular political and ideological agenda of anti-Zionism, demonizing Israel, and the new anti-Semitism, as will be demonstrated in the detailed analyses below.

The NGO Network and the

“Durban Strategy” of Demonization

The Palestinian terror campaign that began in late 2000 is often termed “the second intifada,” erroneously implying a popular uprising. Following the collapse of the Oslo process, it was accompanied by a massive political attack, aimed at delegitimizing and isolating Israel internationally. The UN-sponsored UN World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance that took place in September 2001, in Durban, South Africa provided a key venue for promoting Israel as “an apartheid regime,” through international isolation based on the South African model.

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invisible, while the image of Mohammed al-Dura, the Palestinian child filmed with his father attempting to avoid what was portrayed as Israeli gunfire, became the central symbol.¹³ Largely consistent with this media campaign, the U.S. and European governments publicly criticized and often condemned Israeli responses to terror, and demanded the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the areas controlled by the Palestinian Authority. The European Union threatened economic sanctions, and the UN passed resolutions condemning Israeli policies, using in its justifications the language of human rights and international law.

The NGO network has played a central role in this political war, beginning with the Durban conference and continuing through

the boycott and divestment campaigns. The Durban conference consisted of three parallel gatherings — an official diplomatic forum, a “youth summit,” and a massive NGO Forum, with delegates from 1250 organizations, based on an invitation issued by the UN Human Rights Commission.¹⁴ The atmosphere and rhetoric in all three frameworks featured a high level of vitriolic anti-Semitism, and marked the return of the “Zionism is racism” theme, a decade after the infamous 1975 UN resolution had finally been repealed.¹⁵

The NGO Forum generated most of the publicity and impact from the Durban Conference, focusing on the development of a broad campaign to delegitimize Israel as a sovereign state.¹⁶ The agenda and preliminary texts that were adopted were drafted during a series of preparatory conferences, including one in Tehran, from which Israelis and Jewish delegates were excluded by the Iranian government. In their absence, the resolutions included references to Israel as “committing *holocausts*” and “being *anti-Semitic*.”¹⁷

The major participants in the NGO Forum included MIFTAH (an NGO established by Hanan Ashwari),¹⁸ and the Palestinian Committee for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment, (also known as LAW), which had received over \$1 million from the Ford Foundation, funds from the European Union and over 30 additional sponsors. They played a central role in steering committees, workshops, and related activities, based on the theme “that Israel was an apartheid state.”¹⁹ In addition, major allies, such as SANGOCO (the South African NGO Committee) helped to promote this agenda and codified much of the language that was the basis for the final declaration.²⁰

Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch were also involved in the NGO Forum, and in a radio interview, Kenneth Roth, the

Executive Director of HRW, rejected criticism of this participation, declaring “Clearly Israeli racist practices are an appropriate topic.”²¹ In addition to providing resources, prestige and visibility, these international NGOs were active participants. When the representatives of Jewish NGOs, such as the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists (IAJLJ), sought to participate in the discussions of the caucus of international human rights NGOs, HRW’s advocacy director Reed Brody joined the move to expel them. According to Prof. Anne Bayefsky, an IALJ delegate, Brody declared that representatives of Jewish groups were unwelcome.²² Similarly, Congressman Lantos, a member of the U.S. delegation to the inter-governmental forum, declared, “What is perhaps most disturbing about the NGO community’s actions is that many of America’s top human rights leaders — [including] Reed Brody of Human Rights Watch ... participated. Although most of them denounced the NGO document that was adopted, it was surprising how reluctant they were to attack the anti-Semitic atmosphere ...”²³ (After the conference, when confronted with growing criticism, HRW officials sought to preserve their positions and funding by issuing a statement distancing themselves from the activities and outcome.²⁴)

The text adopted in the NGO Forum at Durban provided a battle plan, to be executed by the NGO network, for the political war against Israel that has been waged since then. Paragraph 164 asserts that the “*targeted victims of Israel’s brand of apartheid and ethnic cleansing methods have been in particular children, women and refugees.*”²⁵ The authors 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 the

use of densely-populated areas for sheltering terrorists to deter Israeli retaliation. 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.*”²⁶ The NGO declaration also condemned “*those states who are supporting, aiding and abetting the Israeli apartheid state and its perpetration of racist crimes against humanity including ethnic cleansing, acts of genocide.*”²⁷

Thus, the Durban conference provided the strategy for the ensuing NGO-led political war against Israel, using the weapons derived from the rhetoric of human rights and international law, and conducted via the UN, the media, churches, and university campuses. The subsequent battles, such as the Jenin “massacre” claims (April 2002), the campaign against the separation barrier (“apartheid wall”) that peaked in 2004, the academic boycott effort in 2005, and the ongoing church-based divestment activities, were all based on this strategy.

NGOs and the Jenin “Massacre” Myth

The Jenin campaign took place in the wake of the Palestinian terror attacks, in which hundreds of Israeli civilians had been killed and thousands wounded, including the Park Hotel bombing on Passover, killing 30 Israelis injuring 160. The Israeli government responded with Defensive Shield, a military operation designed to disrupt and destroy the bases of the terror network located in densely populated urban areas, such as the Jenin refugee camp.

During the Jenin operation, Palestinian spokesmen, such as Saib Erakat, accused Israel of a “massacre,” and much of the media

immediately repeated the claim.

The NGO community played a major role in promoting the false reports of massacre and perpetuating related claims that stripped the Israeli military action from the context of terror, as outlined in the Durban strategy. Immediately after Erakat’s statements were broadcast, officials from Amnesty International and the UN gave credence to the myths, as shown in Martin Himel’s documentary, “Jenin: Massacring Truth.” Professor Derrick Pounder, from Amnesty International, was quoted by the BBC as saying the signs point to a massacre.²⁸ Irene Kahn (also from Amnesty) and Ken Roth (HRW) avoided repeating false claims regarding Palestinian casualties, but their public comments, as well as press releases and detailed reports included numerous ideologically based allegations of Israeli “war crimes” and violations of international law.²⁹ In addition to demonstrating the degree to which the language of international law is used subjectively and inconsistently to promote narrow agendas, these examples highlight the prominent role played by officials of such political NGOs in shaping this pseudo-legal discourse.³⁰

Months later, these NGOs published longer reports with similar claims, resulting in another round of headlines alleging Israeli violations of human rights.³¹ In June 2002, Adalah, an NGO based in Israel and funded by the Ford Foundation, the European Commission and the New Israel Fund, issued a report on *Israeli Military Attacks on the Occupied Palestinian Territories*, highlighting claims of systematic Israeli violations of international law and war crimes.³² Similar terms were used when Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch published high profile reports.³³ While acknowledging that the massacre claims had been fabricated, these reports followed the Durban strategy, erasing the context of the

terror that justified Israeli actions, and using the rhetoric of international law selectively.³⁴

Since then, the NGO network has continued to use the false allegations regarding Jenin to advance the Durban strategy of demonization. In HRW's 2004 "World Report" (published in 2005, three years after Jenin), Kenneth Roth repeated claims of "indiscriminate" attacks that "cause disproportionate harm to civilians." He also condemned the substitution of "war rules when law

enforcement rules could reasonably have been followed," simplistically claiming that Israeli police could simply enter Palestinian cities such as Jenin to arrest Palestinian "militants" and bring them to trial.³⁵ In the UK, Christian Aid, one of Europe's most powerful charities, produced a film on Defensive Shield ("Peace Under Siege") as part of its Christmas campaign. Scenes of Palestinian suffering as a result of "Israeli aggression" were given prominence, including images of tanks pushing ambulances, while images of Israeli victims were practically non-existent.³⁶ (Christian Aid receives significant funding from the UK government³⁷ and widespread support from a large range of major UK Churches including the Church of England, Baptist, and Lutheran Churches,³⁸ which provide this organization with considerable influence.)

In these activities, which consistently invoked the rhetoric of human rights and international law, the NGO community stripped these concepts of their essential universality. The various reports published by HRW, Amnesty International, the International Commission of Jurists, Adalah, and others, made no effort to place the Israeli actions in the context of terror, or to compare the responses to other situations involving massive

violence, incitement, and terrorism. For example, these NGOs issued far fewer reports and devoted a much lower level of resources in response to the mass killings in Sudan that were taking place during the same period.³⁹ The obsessive focus on Israel, as displayed at the Durban NGO Forum in 2001, reflected a very narrow and particularist approach to human rights, thereby undermining the moral foundation of these norms.

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The objective of the NGO campaign, based on allegations of Israeli "war crimes" and human rights violations, was to create the basis for the

next stage of the Durban strategy. In this plan, formed on the South African analogy, the United Nations would declare Israel to be an outlaw state, and begin discussions of sanctions.

However, the effort to have the UN, with its strong institutional bias against Israel, investigate the Jenin "massacre," floundered after the Israeli government refused to cooperate or recognize the legitimacy of the panel. (At the time, Prime Minister Sharon hesitated, and finally decided against cooperation after the biases of its members and the limited terms of its mandate, which excluded Palestinian terror, became clear.) In addition, the revelation that the massacre claims were unfounded blocked further action on this basis.

Nevertheless, the NGO-led campaign based on the Jenin massacre myth provided the foundations for moving forward with the strategy of demonizing Israel, based on the imposition of sanctions and boycotts.

Taking the “Apartheid Wall” to Sanctions: Stage 2 of the NGO Durban Strategy

After focusing attention and vast resources on Jenin, allegations of Israeli “war crimes” and massive violations of human rights the NGO network added a new focus. In 2004, these NGO campaigns found a new target in the form of Israel’s separation barrier, which, as in the case of Defensive Shield, was built to prevent terror attacks. An intensive media campaign led by prominent NGOs, in cooperation with the Palestinians and Arab governments, promoted a UN General Assembly resolution. The resolution, couched in terms of Palestinian victimization,

referred the issue to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for an “advisory opinion.” This text would provide a façade of international legitimacy for imposing

“a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state...[and] the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive sanctions and embargoes,” as adopted by the NGO Forum at Durban.

The adoption of the separation barrier as the foundation for this stage of the Durban strategy again emphasized the transformation of the universal principles of human rights and international law into particular criteria created specifically in order to condemn and marginalize Israel. Just as many of the governments that submitted briefs to the ICJ condemning Israel’s policy had erected their own barriers with similar impact on the local population, the NGOs that issued the torrent of reports attacking Israel on this issue did not mention these numerous other examples.

Initially, the campaign succeeded, and the ICJ, which is a political body with a judicial

facade,⁴⁰ issued its advisory opinion on July 2004. As expected, the majority claimed that the Israeli policy was a violation of international law. (The dissenting opinion by Judge Buergenthal focused on the errors in the ICJ’s analysis).⁴¹ This text generally followed the mandate issued by the UN General Assembly, and largely ignored the question of Palestinian terrorism. (In September 2005, the Israeli High Court of Justice ruled that as a result of this bias, the ICJ’s advisory opinion had no validity as a basis for policy making.⁴²)

HRW was among the most active international NGOs in this phase of the demonization process, including distribution of press releases and mass emails with calls

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to the U.S. government and the European Union to penalize Israel for building this barrier.⁴³

HRW’s statements repeated Palestinian claims that the barrier

impedes “freedom of movement,” endangers “access to food, water, education, and medical services,” and appropriates land, without even engaging with the Israeli rationale.⁴⁴ The evidence in this, as in most other HRW reports and publications regarding Israel, was provided by Palestinian “eyewitnesses” carefully selected journalists, and other sources whose credibility could not be verified.

As in other cases, the NGO reports on the separation barrier provided little or no analysis of the Israeli security environment, and the role of the Palestinian officials in promoting terror. (HRW’s single major report on terror absolved Arafat of responsibility.⁴⁵) This framework, as well as the rhetoric and repetition of Palestinian claims, couched in the language and claims of human rights, was adopted and reinforced by the UNGA resolutions and the ICJ’s majority opinion.⁴⁶

Other major NGOs were also very active in this phase, including Christian Aid, Amnesty International, World Vision,⁴⁷ the Palestinian NGOs assembled under the Palestinian Environmental NGO Network (PENGON), the Palestinian Grassroots Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign (www.stopthewall.org), Palestinian affiliates of the International Commission of Jurists,⁴⁸ etc.; the UK-based War on Want,⁴⁹ the Mennonite Central Committee⁵⁰, Medicine du Monde⁵¹ (based in France), and many others. The language and terms of reference that they used was very similar to that used by HRW. Christian Aid lobbied against the British government's position opposing the ICJ as the appropriate forum for consideration of the barrier. In a press release entitled "Why the Israeli 'barrier' is wrong," this NGO belittled "Israel's legitimate fears about terrorism," in two sentences, while 21 paragraphs described Palestinian hardships inflicted by Israel's "land grab."⁵² Similarly, Amnesty International published a detailed report accusing Israel of "violat[ing] international law and . . . contributing to grave human rights violations."⁵³

These activities demonstrated that for these NGOs, the details that led to the construction of the barrier, the discussion in the UN, and the ICJ advisory opinion were of little importance. The objective was to use these activities to promote sanctions, consistent with the Durban strategy.

Thus, in parallel with the publicity given to the ICJ's "advisory opinion" in the second half of 2004, preparations began in Britain to promote an academic boycott via the major faculty unions. In addition, a campaign began to press selected commercial firms, such as the Caterpillar Corporation, to end business with Israel. This boycott effort was accompanied by a great deal of publicity, including press conferences and rallies, at which NGO officials took an active role. Similarly, the drive

calling for divestment from Israel began in a number of churches in the UK, the U.S., and Canada.

The momentum based on the NGO led-campaign against the "apartheid wall" faltered, despite the degree to which the international court followed the script, when some governments that had supported the initial UNGA resolution, including the EU and Canada, lost enthusiasm. Thus, the next phase, in which the UNGA was expected to adopt the advisory opinion as the basis for considering sanctions, was delayed and watered down. However, the NGO network quickly found other ways to promote boycott and sanctions.

The Boycott Phase of the Durban Strategy

Following the model of Jenin and the "apartheid wall" campaign, in October 2004, Human Rights Watch released a 135-page glossy publication entitled "Razing Rafah" that condemned the Israeli policy along the Egyptian border with Gaza.⁵⁴ This report focused primarily on allegations that Israeli responses to the smuggling of weapons and explosives in this area led to the unjustified demolition of Palestinian houses. HRW head Kenneth Roth came to Jerusalem's American Colony Hotel for a press conference and other media events to gain the widest coverage.⁵⁵ The largely unverified allegations in this report, based on Palestinian eyewitnesses, provided the basis for the next stage, in which HRW promoted the effort to force Caterpillar to end sales to Israel. HRW's activities also included mass emails and public letters, as well as participation in rallies outside the meeting of Caterpillar share-holders in Chicago.

HRW was joined by many other NGOs in these activities, including Amnesty

International, the Israel Committee Against Housing Demolitions (ICAH), Sabeel and War on Want, a radical British NGO that enrolled entertainment celebrities in its high profile campaign against the “wall” and for divestment.⁵⁶ Caterpillar was to be the public relations focus of the effort to impose economic sanctions and boycotts on Israel, following the Durban strategy, and despite the failure to gain official support from the UN at this stage.

In parallel, other NGOs supported a group of anti-Israel extremists in the UK, such as Sue Blackwell and Hillary Rose, seeking to gain approval from the Association of University Teachers (AUT) for a boycott of Israeli universities.⁵⁷ The AUT boycott effort was initiated in 2002, as part of the Jenin “massacre” campaign, and was revived in the context of the separation barrier campaigns and the ICJ decision. The language of the boycott resolutions was written and publicized by the PNGO (the Palestinian NGO network).⁵⁸ (Many members of PNGO were active in Durban, and PNGO co-sponsored a conference held in London during December 2004 that re-launched the boycott movement.)

Although initially successful, this effort also faltered when the AUT delegates voted to rescind the earlier decisions.⁵⁹ In terms of public relations and propaganda, however, the momentum behind the demonization process was maintained.

In their wake, another front was opened, based on a series of anti-Israel divestment resolutions and debates, adopted and publicized by Lutheran, Anglican, and other politicized Protestant church groups. The church-based divestment campaign was promoted by many of the active Palestinian NGOs, such as MIFTAH, BADIL, a radical group which promotes refugee claims; Al-Mezan, (based in

Gaza); ADRID, Ittijah, The Applied Research Institute Jerusalem (ARIJ), and others.

The divestment campaign also gained visibility through the activities of Christian-based NGOs, such as the Mennonite Central Committee (based in North America and a recipient of significant Canadian government funding), the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center (based in Bethlehem), and groups such as Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT)⁶⁰ and EAPPI⁶¹.

The church-based divestment campaign illustrates the “soft power” influence of NGOs over institutional actors. For example War on Want⁶², Christian Aid, and Sabeel were instrumental in the Church of England’s initial vote for “morally responsible investment” (essentially divestment) from Caterpillar. Christian Aid’s films and Christmas campaigns such as “Peace Under Siege” and “Child of Bethlehem,” and War on Want’s “alternative” report on Caterpillar influenced the Church debate in 2005 and laid the foundations that Sabeel exploited the following year. In January 2006, Rev Stephen Sizer, Vice Chair of Friends of Sabeel UK and a proponent of “replacement theology,” introduced a resolution on divestment at the meeting of the Synod, and the participants (including the head of the Church, the Archbishop of Canterbury who also sits in the House of Lords) approved this move.

Sabeel is a radical Palestinian NGO, whose leader, Naim Ateek, uses Christian theological images to promote demonization of Israel as an “Apartheid state.” Sabeel’s activities and Ateek’s frequent international speaking tours are funded and publicized by local support groups and major NGOs, including Christian Aid. And Rev. John Gladwin, Anglican Bishop of Chelmsford, member of the Church of England Synod and chair of Christian Aid’s Board of Trustees, is a “patron” of Sabeel’s

fund-raising arm in the UK.⁶³

Thus, NGO influence on the Synod motion on divestment was tangible: the vocabulary of “Morally Responsible Investment” was coined by Sabeel⁶⁴ and the text called for members to visit “recent house demolitions.” This element was provided by a small EU-funded NGO known as the Israel Committee Against Housing Demolitions, which provides a platform for Jeff Halper, an Israeli who regularly appears alongside Ateek, and provides “legitimacy” for the extremist agenda.

As in the case of the AUT academic boycott, the furor following the adoption of this resolution led to a declaration by the Church’s decision-making body not to implement the motion. But the threats, as well as the promotion of this form of anti-Israeli boycott activity in the overall Durban strategy, gained additional attention.

The NGO “Halo Effect” and the US State Department

As noted above, the explicitly political campaigns of the NGO network are promoted and protected from careful scrutiny and criticism by the “halo effect” that continues to surround the unverified or false reports. The impact of the “halo effect” extends to the U.S. Department of State, whose annual Country Reports on Human Rights continue to cite the NGO claims without question. These reports are seen by many as a benchmark in determining which nations are the worst human rights abusers and are seen as authoritative and reliable. In its human rights report on Israel, the State Department quotes *directly* from few sources other than

these NGOs and the “evidence” which they provide constitutes a substantial proportion of the report.

The State Department’s reports demonstrate the degree to which the NGOs involved in the Durban process have come to dominate the discussions of human rights, including within the US government,

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without questioning their credibility or accuracy. The 2004 and 2005 country reports include numerous citations from Amnesty International and

HRW, as well as local politicized NGOs funded by the European Union, the New Israel Fund, and other sources. The local NGOs in this category include Adalah, Physicians for Human Rights – Israel, B’Tselem, ICAHD, PCATI, Machsom Watch, etc. In contrast, NGO reports critical of the Palestinian Authority are largely absent from the State Department’s publications.

The emphasis placed on HRW’s “Razing Rafah” by the State Department in 2004 provides a particular example of the degree to which unsubstantiated and biased claims by NGOs are repeated without question, including in official documents. As noted above, this report, which was released and publicized the context of the anti-Israel boycott campaign, was largely based on unverified Palestinian allegations. HRW’s sweeping claims rejecting the military necessity of the operation were also accepted at face value, and without an attempt to verify the conclusions through the U.S. government expertise that is available to the State Department. In a similar manner, this report repeats Amnesty International’s allegation that the death of two Palestinian children in Rafah was caused by Israeli snipers. Amnesty’s conclusion is not based on serious

research, but on questionable extrapolations based entirely on photos allegedly taken by journalists.

These examples of the U.S. State Department's readiness to repeat unverified NGO allegations with respect to Israel demonstrate the degree to which the Durban strategy has been assisted by official government bodies. In particular, this aspect of the "Halo effect" has formed a central pillar of the foundation that allows for the expansion of the anti-Israel boycott and divestment campaigns.

Gongs and Quangos: Funding the NGO Campaign Against Israel

Over five years of very intensive NGO campaigning (beginning with the Durban conference), delegitimizing Israel has been very costly. The constant production and distribution of glossy reports, press conferences, and public relations events used to gain attention in the media, frequent travel by NGO officials to promote their agendas, and large staffs require considerable budgets. Without funding from governments, particularly in Europe, politicized philanthropic organizations, such as the Ford Foundation, the New Israel Fund, church-based groups who fund Sabeel, Christian Aid, Caritas, MCC, and KAIROS, and wealthy donors to NGOs such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, this campaign would not have gone very far.

The funding for the international NGO superpowers that lead and provide the publicity for the demonization strategy — from Durban through Anglican divestment — provides the oxygen for this process. The sums involved in supporting politicized NGOs are huge by any standard. For example, Amnesty International's annual

operating budget is \$30 million, and it claims to have projects in 140 countries, as well as a half million members. Human Rights Watch (HRW) has an annual operating budget of approximately \$50 million, and Christian Aid's budget is \$60 million. Other major global NGOs active in the Durban process include the Geneva-based International Commission of Jurists, OXFAM, Save the Children, and Medicine Sans Frontiers.

As noted, the Ford Foundation, with an annual budget of \$500 million, was one of the major sources of funding for the NGO Forum of the Durban Conference, in addition to European and Canadian government grants provided under the headings of "civil society," "development aid," and "promotion of democracy."⁶⁵ The NGOs supported by Ford involved in the Durban Conference and the promotion of the radical anti-Israel agenda include HRW and Palestinian groups such as LAW, Al Mezan, Al Haq, and members of the PNGO network.⁶⁶ Al-Mezan, for example, is a particularly vitriolic organization despite its mission statement, which projects an image of impartiality. The group's activities are highly biased, routinely accusing Israel of war crimes and massacres, without mention of Palestinian terror activities, weapons smuggling and similar illegal activities.⁶⁷

After the details of Ford's role in funding many of the participants in the Durban NGO Forum were revealed, seventeen members of the U.S. Congress signed a letter sent to Ford President Susan Berresford, asking for an end to "funding [for] subversive groups." Following the hearings which highlighted Ford's abuse of its status as a tax-exempt charity to promote incitement and justification of terror against Israel, Berresford wrote to Representative Jerrold Nadler pledging: "We will never support groups that promote or condone bigotry or violence, or that challenge the very

existence of legitimate, sovereign states like Israel.”⁶⁸ This was a very clear pledge to prevent additional funding for NGOs that promote the Durban strategy. Ford also published new guidelines,⁶⁹ and ceased funding for a small number of NGOs, including the Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights (LAW) and Habitat International Coalition (HIC).⁷⁰ However, as noted by NGO Monitor, Ford has continued to fund several NGOs that are active in promoting the Durban strategy of demonization.⁷¹

In addition, large-scale government funding for NGOs is provided as “development assistance,” and support for unelected “civil society” groups that are falsely viewed as providing the foundation for democracy. The major government funding for politicized NGOs involved in the Durban strategy includes the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)⁷², USAID, the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK, and their counterparts in Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, as well as direct funding from the EU and World Bank. (NGOs that receive most of their funds from states become quasi-non-governmental organizations (QUANGOs) or governmental non-governmental organizations (GONGs)).

This funding has created the basis for the growth of hundreds of local NGOs. Some are registered non-profit groups in Israel while others are based in the Palestinian Authority, Jordan, and elsewhere. Through partner relationships, these NGOs receive funding, media access, and other assistance from the NGO superpowers in return for information and the appearance of credibility resulting from a “presence” on the ground.

Local NGOs funded from the outside that support radical pro-Palestinian (and anti-Israeli) positions and campaigns through

relations with the superpower organizations include Sabeel (headed by Naim Ateek), LAW, Miftah (headed by PLO official and frequent spokeswoman Hanan Ashwari), I’lam, Al-Haq, Al-Mezan, ARIJ, ICAHD⁷³, Physicians for Human Rights – Israel (PHR-I)⁷⁴, PCHR (Palestinian Center for Human Rights), and dozens more. The involvement of Israelis from the radical fringe of society, including academics, is viewed as providing legitimacy to anti-Israeli agendas.⁷⁵ The Palestinian NGOs are linked under the banner of the Palestinian NGO Network (PNGO), which was central in promoting the academic boycott efforts and the divestment campaign in the UK as a “human rights” measure.

Following the lead of the global NGOs, and in contrast to universal human rights claims, these NGOs, largely funded by church groups and foreign governments, (European, Canadian, and U.S.⁷⁶) issue little or no condemnations of Palestinian violations of basic human rights, including terrorism. Examination of the activities and reports between 2000 and 2005 of groups such as MIFTAH, Al Mezan, etc., or of Palestinian NGOs claiming “environmental” objectives, such as ARIJ, demonstrates the primary focus on allegations against Israel. In contrast, language referring to Palestinian development, good governance, or “civil society” is a façade, and the level of activity focusing on these objectives is essentially zero.

The case of ARIJ is illustrative. The ARIJ receives funding from the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the EU and other sources. This NGO describes itself as “dedicated to promoting sustainable development in the occupied Palestinian territories.” But an analysis of its activities demonstrated that ARIJ officials frequently stray from this mandate in favor of promoting the anti-Israel political agenda. The campaigns

include, among other issues, intense opposition to the security barrier (or “apartheid wall” as ARIJ refers to it). ARIJ’s publications also justify violence by referring to suicide bombers as “martyrs,”⁷⁷ and regularly use language of incitement, accusing Israel of “war crimes,” “massacres” and “ethnic cleansing.”⁷⁸

MIFTAH similarly presents a mission statement highlighting a commitment to “democratic practice, the rule of law and respect for human rights and states that it is “non-partisan.” In reality, this prominent EU-funded NGO played a central role in the Durban conference, and continues to have a leading role in the implementation of the strategy of demonization. MIFTAH does not recognize the infringement of Israeli human rights by Palestinians, despite the use of the universal language of human rights in its declaration of principles. Instead, MIFTAH’s activities routinely compare Israeli policies to those of apartheid South Africa, and promote boycotts of Israeli goods and divestment.⁷⁹ In addition, MIFTAH was accused of using fictitious quotes attributed to Ariel Sharon to support false claims that he had called for genocide and other such crimes.⁸⁰

Thus, the ability of the NGO network to promote the Durban strategy of demonization is based on the funds that are made available to both the international and local organizations. Funders are either not interested in the activities of these NGOs and accept the organizations’ mission statements at face value and without independent verification, or they approve of these anti-Israel campaigns.

Countering the Power of NGOs in the Durban Strategy

The evidence presented in this article demonstrates the central role of politicized NGOs that use the rhetoric of human rights,

humanitarian assistance, and international law to promote the political war against Israel. In promoting the Durban strategy, these NGOs are numerous and powerful, skillfully using their access to media as a force multiplier in this effort to turn Israel into the next “apartheid” state. Protected by the “halo effect” and the absence of accountability, the NGO network provided the foundation for the campaigns designed to gain international condemnation of Israel. This strategy is based on the transformation of the principles of universal human rights into fluid criteria that are applied uniquely to Israel.

To counter these attacks, it is necessary to focus on strategies designed to roll back the exploitation of universal norms to attack Israel and to reduce the power of the NGO network. As a result of the growing debate over NGO abuses of human rights, the lack of universality in NGO reports has begun to attract attention. While the decision-making process regarding allocation of resources to targets among NGOs remains very secretive, there are some important changes. For example, HRW’s reconstituted Middle East Advisory Board implemented significant changes to offset the NGO’s overemphasis on Israel between 2000 and 2004. As a result, in 2005, HRW’s reports on the Middle East included analyses of human rights abuses in Libya, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and elsewhere.

To continue to make progress in this process, it will be necessary to remove the “halo effect” that has protected the activities and biases of NGO officials from scrutiny and accountability. Powerful individuals, such as Kenneth Roth of HRW, and Irene Kahn of Amnesty International, are frequent commentators on radio and television, and their analyses appear in the Op-ed pages of major newspapers. These analyses and claims regarding allegations of human rights

abuses are repeated in the media, where they are presented as unbiased, objective, and credible.⁸¹

In December 2005, growing criticism of Christian Aid's biases in the Jewish Chronicle (London) based on NGO Monitor reports, which were echoed by some Jewish leaders, led the leaders of this powerful NGO to request a meeting with the Chief Rabbi of the UK, Jonathan Sachs. As a result of this meeting and the desire to demonstrate that Christian Aid's leaders were not anti-Semitic or anti-Israel, a consultation agreement was reached on future Christian Aid reports and activities related to Israel. While it is too early to assess the extent and success of the implementation of these guidelines, the terms and the meeting itself reflect a weakening of the "halo effect."

Detailed NGO Monitor reports and analyses on the role of government funding for radical anti-Israel NGOs in Canada and Europe have also begun to have an impact. Beginning in January 2006, the European Union has pledged to implement transparency in providing information on the funding of Israeli NGOs, including political groups such as HRA, Physicians for Human Rights – Israel, and Machsom Watch. In Canada, members of the opposition Conservative Party raised the issue of funding for politicized NGOs by the government funding agency known as CIDA. (CIDA has provided funding for BADIL, and for the pro-Palestinian Mennonite Central Committee, which, in turn supports other NGOs.⁸²) The Conservative Party's victory in the January 2006 elections raised the prospect of a policy change in this area, following the end to funding of the Palestinian Authority after Hamas took power.

This activity has only begun to provide some opposition to the Durban strategy, and to press NGOs that claim to promote human rights to actually implement their

mission statements. As shown in this paper, government agencies, hostile church groups, and powerful philanthropies, such as the Ford Foundation, provide immense resources in support of the NGO network pressing the demonization of Israel. A successful response must be sustained over many years and be able to mobilize significant resources in order to restore the universality of human rights norms and defeat the Durban strategy.

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