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June 22, 2023, hearing on “Responding to Anti-Semitism and Anti-Israel Bias in the UN, Palestinian Authority, and NGO Community”

Written Testimony to Subcommittee on Global Health, Global Human Rights and International Organizations

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) claiming to promote human rights are among the leading purveyors of “new antisemitism” – often expressed through the vilification of Israel and Zionism, and the exclusion of Israelis and Zionists from the realm of human rights. These NGOs deny the legitimacy of Israel, regardless of borders; negate Jewish connections to the land; and promote campaigns to reverse Jewish self-determination. A common theme is that Israel is uniquely evil – equated at times to Nazi Germany, inherently racist, and irredeemable. Through their exploitation of human rights discourse, these NGOs are often shielded from criticism of their antisemitism, and governments, particularly in Europe, continue to fund them.

Furthermore, prominent NGOs such as Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty International repeatedly reject calls to join meaningful campaigns to combat antisemitism, despite the global rise in attacks on Jews.ⁱ This behavior makes Jews the exception to universal human rights.

At the same time, these NGOs are very active in campaigns to undermine or replace the consensus International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) Working Definition of antisemitism and other tools that identify and seek to combat all forms of modern Jew-hatred – including antisemitism from anti-Israel activists claiming progressive agendas. The NGOs intensively lobby governments, UN bodies, and professional organizations to reject the IHRA Working Definition, in service of their anti-Israel bias.

The denial of antisemitism as is manifested in singling out Israel, also extends to attempts to influence content moderation policies, allowing bigotry to be amplified on social media platforms.

IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism

Adopted in 2016, the IHRA Working Definition of antisemitism (“IHRA”) is the most widely accepted modern definition of anti-Jewish prejudice, adopted and implemented by hundreds of national and local governments, international bodies, and public institutions.ⁱⁱ Developed in response to the infamous 2001 UN Durban conference, as discussed below, IHRA’s unique contribution to the struggle against antisemitism is its acknowledgement of modern manifestations of anti-Jewish sentiment and deed, alongside and often combined with forms of classic antisemitism.

IHRA’s examples of antisemitism include behavior and rhetoric that characterizes many NGO campaigns and statements, such as:

- Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.
- Applying double standards by requiring of it a behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation.
- Using the symbols and images associated with classic antisemitism (e.g., claims of Jews killing Jesus or blood libel) to characterize Israel or Israelis.
- Drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis.

The NGO Campaign to Dismantle Israel

The systematic NGO campaign to delegitimize Israel and deny Jews their right to self-determination began in earnest at the UN's 2001 World Conference on Racism in Durban. This conference and its NGO Forum were attended and organized by over 1,500 NGOs from around the world and powerful international actors such as HRW and Amnesty International were active participants.

Writing at the time, Congressman Tom Lantos – one of the leaders of the US delegation to Durban – labeled the gathering a “debacle,” “diplomatic fiasco,” and “an anti-American, anti-Israeli circus,” and described the vilification and exclusion of Jewish delegates both during, and in preparation of the conference.ⁱⁱⁱ

The participating NGOs approved, by consensus, a Final Declaration that singled out Israel; declared “Israel as a racist, apartheid state”; and referred to “the Israeli apartheid state and its perpetration of racist crimes against humanity including ethnic cleansing, [and] acts of genocide.”^{iv} Thus, the NGOs relaunched the infamous 1975 UN resolution labeling Zionism as racism, sponsored by the Soviet bloc and the Arab League.

Specifically, the Final Declaration:

- “Call[s] for the launch of an international anti Israeli Apartheid movement as implemented against South African Apartheid through a global solidarity campaign network of international civil society, UN bodies and agencies, business communities and to end the conspiracy of silence among states, particularly the European Union and the United States.”
- “Call[s] upon the international community to impose a policy of complete and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state as in the case of South Africa which means 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.”

Since Durban, NGOs, under the banners of human rights and international law, have repeatedly and concertedly advanced this agenda, which seeks to dismantle Israel as a Jewish State.

This strategy manifests in several ways.

First, NGOs openly campaign to brand the Jewish State as inherently illegitimate and its founding an ill to be remedied, as they criminalize Jewish self-determination by branding Israel as an “apartheid state.”

Second, through the tactics of BDS – boycotts, divestment, and sanctions – NGOs seek to isolate Israel and cause economic harm to the country and to those conducting business there or maintaining business relationships with Israeli entities – including American corporations. Congress has rightfully rejected these campaigns, noting that “the Global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement targeting Israel is not about promoting coexistence, civil rights, and political reconciliation but about questioning and undermining the very legitimacy of the country and its people.”^v

Third, the NGOs, in cooperation with Palestinian officials and their allies, successfully lobbied the International Criminal Court (ICC) to launch an investigation into Israel, despite it not being a member of the Rome Treaty – a concerning precedent for the US. NGOs continue to provide reports and information to the ICC Prosecutor, with the goal of having Israelis prosecuted in The Hague.

Lastly, NGOs seek to weaken Israel’s security, by agitating for arms embargoes and encouraging the PA to freeze mutually beneficial security cooperation with Israel – a particularly obscene demand that increases the likelihood of terrorism. In both instances, these efforts are underpinned by double standards, distortions of international law, and the erasure of Palestinian violence and basic context for evaluating Israeli policies and actions.

This testimony provides illustrative examples of these phenomena.

Denying Israel’s Right to Exist – The NGO Apartheid Campaign

The antisemitic apartheid charge against Israel began with anti-Zionist Soviet propaganda in the 1950s, and has since been adopted and refined, including the rhetoric of Arab states and the PLO of the 1960s, and revived with the Durban Conference and the work of UN Special Rapporteurs John Dugard and Richard Falk.^{vi}

In 2021, a network of Israeli, Palestinian, and international NGOs launched a concerted effort to emphasize the apartheid allegation and advance a narrative of unparalleled Israeli criminality. They published dozens of reports, made numerous submissions to UN bodies, and invested heavily in media campaigns. As shown by detailed analyses published by NGO Monitor, the definitions of apartheid used by these NGOs cannot be legally substantiated. Instead, these groups promote artificial and manufactured definitions designed to extend the ongoing agenda of delegitimizing and demonizing Israel.^{vii}

Perhaps the most extreme version was a May 2022 submission to the UN Human Rights Council’s permanent “Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and in Israel” (COI).^{viii} A coalition of 90 Palestinian, European, Canadian, and American NGOs – many funded by the EU or European governments – articulated their absolutist rejection of the notion of a Jewish State.^{ix}

These NGOs declared:

- “Colonised Palestine refers to the self-determination unit of the Palestinian people and territory of Mandate Palestine (prior to 1948), and which today constitutes the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt) and the territory recognized as the State of Israel in 1948.”
- “The 1948 Territory refers to the territory of the settler-colonial State of Israel, established by the displacement and dispossession of the vast majority (around 80 percent) of the

indigenous Palestinian people during the Nakba and the maintenance of a settler colonial and apartheid regime over the Palestinian people since its creation.”

- “The Palestinian people argued that the incorporation of the Balfour Declaration was illegal.”

Similar language can be found in a 200-page manifesto published on November 29, 2022 – marking the 105th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration – by the Palestinian NGO Al-Haq.^x Funded by a number of European governments, Al-Haq is designated by Israel as a terrorist entity due to its ties to the US-designated Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).^{xi}

In it, Al-Haq defines Zionism and Israel as fundamentally racist and illegitimate, and extorts the international community to dismantle the Jewish State.^{xii} In addition, Al-Haq refers to “the Zionist movement’s racist character” and “Israel’s institutionalised discrimination against the indigenous Palestinian people” is “inherent in the ideology operationalised in the founding institutions of the Zionist settler colonial project in Palestine.”

In attacking those who fail Al-Haq’s purity test of seeking Israel’s complete elimination, the group writes, “According to this approach, apartheid can be ended if the Israeli occupation comes to an end. Thus, the colonisation of Palestinian land by the Zionist movement from the late 19th century onward is legitimised, as is the dispossession of Palestinians and the denial of the right of return of Palestinian refugees since the start of the Nakba.”

Likewise, an April 2021 document by HRW focused on allegations of “apartheid” delegitimizes the notion of a Jewish State, echoing the Final Declaration from the NGO Forum of the Durban conference and its “call for the repeal of all discriminatory laws within the state of Israel, including those of return and citizenship, which are part of the institutionalized racism and Apartheid regime in Israel.”^{xiii}

In addition to distortions of the legal and lived reality in Israel, HRW focused specific opprobrium on laws – such as the Law of Return and laws defining Israel as “Jewish and democratic” – that guarantee its status as the nation-state of the Jewish People.^{xiv}

Amnesty International followed in February 2022 with a similar publication.^{xv} The NGO circulated a draft that declared, “This system of Apartheid originated with the creation of Israel in May 1948 and has been built and maintained for decades” – meaning that Israel is inherently illegitimate.^{xvi} When the draft was leaked, triggering extensive public criticism, Amnesty changed this line to read, “This system of apartheid has been built and maintained over decades.”

More broadly, numerous NGO “apartheid” reports published as part of this coordinated campaign – including those described above – contain a litany of demands on Israel, which, if enacted, would mean the dismantling of Israel as a Jewish State. Other governments and international bodies are encouraged to apply sanctions on Israel if it fails to repeal laws that encourage Jewish immigration and that preserve the country’s status as the nation-state of the Jewish People.

No similar accusations are made by these NGOs regarding any other country. In this respect, as with the BDS campaign, Israel, as the nation state of the Jewish people, is the target of double standards under the facade of human rights.

Erasing Jewish History

A central tactic in NGO campaigns of delegitimization is erasing Jewish – and Christian – history and presence in the land.

In a January 2019 publication, Amnesty International called for governments to prevent tourism companies from promoting travel over the 1949 Armistice Line – including in Jerusalem’s Old City – accusing them of “contributing to, and profiting from...war crimes,” and “legitimizing” an “illegal situation.”^{xvii}

In this context, in a section titled “The Importance of Tourism to the Settlement Economy,” Amnesty notes that “The top three most visited places by foreign tourists in 2017 were all in Jerusalem’s Old City,” suggesting that this is a problem in need of remedy. In a footnote, Amnesty reveals that these sites are “the Western Wall, the Jewish Quarter and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.”

Amnesty also complains that the “financial benefits both to Israel and to businesses operating in occupied territory ...is because most foreign visitors also enter the OPT.”

Following the release of the report, Mayor of Frankfurt Uwe Becker stated, “Amnesty International is promoting ethnic cleansing...[and] walking in the footprints of the antisemitic BDS movement.”^{xviii}

Economic Warfare

The NGO-led campaign to harm Israel and dismantle the Jewish State also harms material US interests, with American companies a particularly salient target of these activists.

In February 2020, the UN Human Rights Council published a “blacklist” of 112 companies operating over the Israel/West Bank 1949 Armistice Line, including 6 US corporations.^{xix}

The defamatory list was based on consultations with BDS groups, including HRW, and was the subject of a multi-year NGO campaign to both convince the UN to launch the initiative, and to ultimately create the database and populate it with companies.^{xx}

Importantly, there is no international legal prohibition on conducting business activities in conflict zones, situations of occupation, or disputed territories. Many of the companies on the list engage in business activities mandated by Israeli-Palestinian agreements endorsed, guaranteed, and witnessed by the international community, including the US and the UN. For instance, many of the listed companies provide utility services (water, gas, electricity, phone) to Palestinians and even have contractual agreements directly with the PA.^{xxi}

The NGO motivations therefore were not to apply international law, but rather to further their efforts to isolate Israel.

Anti-Israel groups are also instrumentalizing business and human rights frameworks at the UN to promote BDS. By manipulating these bodies, they can influence ESG analytics and due diligence legislation in Europe that applies to American and Israeli companies.^{xxii}

Similarly, anti-Israel NGOs have launched failed attempts at pressuring a number of US companies to cut ties with Israel, or substantially limit their operations there. NGOs have called for BDS measures against US tourism operators (described above) and defense contractors, alongside

similar campaigns against the Israeli banking, telecommunication, infrastructure, retail and other businesses.^{xxiii}

Common to all these NGO activities are distortions of and disregard for international law, Israeli-Palestinian agreements, and global business standards.

International Criminal Court (ICC)

On March 3, 2021, then ICC Chief Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda announced the launch of a formal investigation. This announcement was to a significant degree the product of consistent and substantial NGO lobbying and engagements.^{xxiv}

The goal of prosecuting Israelis in international courts was already articulated at the Durban Conference, where the NGO Forum Final Declaration called for the establishment of a “war crimes tribunal” against Israel “to investigate and bring to justice those who may be guilty of war crimes, acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing and the crime of Apartheid.”

Throughout, NGOs have been central to promoting the Prosecutor’s activities: lobbying the Court to accept the PA as a member – thus providing jurisdictional cover to prosecute Israelis; filing complaints; representing “victims”; and submitting briefs. The European Union, EU-member states, and other European governments have substantial funding to NGOs leading anti-Israel ICC campaigns and related lobbying.^{xxv}

Manipulating the Rights of Children to Blacklist the IDF

A related campaign, also based on distortions and manipulations of international law and Israeli practice, is intended to generate international sanctions and arms embargoes against the IDF, thus degrading Israel’s security.

The UN Secretary-General publishes a yearly report on “Children and Armed Conflict,” (CAAC) which surveys instances of alleged “grave violations” of children’s rights around the world.^{xxvi} The CAAC report includes an annex listing “parties to armed conflict” that perpetrate these “grave violations.”

The annex is designed to generate “targeted measures against violators, including the possibility of sanctions.” To date, the annex almost entirely consists of failed states, state-sponsored militias, and terrorist organizations such as ISIS, Boko Haram, the Taliban, and Al-Qaeda.

As documented by NGO Monitor in several publications, Israel is the target of an ongoing, multi-year, NGO-led campaign that exploits children by advocating for the IDF’s inclusion on this blacklist. Critically, NGO reporting and data collection serves as the basis for UN documentation, bestowing the imprimatur of the UN on the agendas and claims of politicized anti-Israel actors. Many of these NGOs are funded by European governments.^{xxvii}

In recent years, corresponding to this campaign, NGO publications and Secretary-General CAAC reports have used criteria that are unique to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and not applied by the UN anywhere else in the world.

Reflecting the centrality of anti-Israel NGOs to CAAC reporting – particularly those linked to the PFLP terrorist organization – the indoctrination of Palestinian children to engage in violence against Israelis, and their recruitment and use by designated terrorist organizations is widely ignored. This

pervasive phenomenon of Palestinian teens engaging in violence against Israeli civilians and security personnel is essential context for understanding Israeli responses, including the use of lethal force and detention of minors.

Since January 2018, NGO Monitor has identified approximately 90 Palestinian minors killed while engaging in violence against Israelis, including shootings and stabbings, as well as lobbing explosives, Molotov cocktails, and stones, and other violent acts. These include at least 37 teens affiliated with terrorist organizations, including Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Lions' Den, PFLP, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and other factions.^{xxviii}

This represents the “grave violation” of recruitment and use of children. The UN claimed it could only verify four such instances of recruitment and use by Palestinian terror organizations in 2021, reflecting the inability, or unwillingness, of the agencies and NGOs involved to conduct effective research.^{xxix}

The NGO campaign against Israeli defense also includes pressuring the PA to cease security cooperation with Israel – a practice that both protects Israelis from terrorism and thwarts efforts by Hamas to launch a takeover of the West Bank. In 2021 and 2022, publications by HRW and Amnesty International, respectively, called for ending this coordination, alleging that it contributes to “apartheid.”^{xxx}

Notably, NGO anti-IDF messaging has included comparisons to Nazi Germany. During the 2014 conflict between Israel and Gaza-based terrorist organizations launching rockets at Israeli population centers, Ken Roth and another HRW official promoted a letter equating “Nazi genocide” with “the massacre of Palestinians in Gaza,” and that exclaimed, “‘Never again’ must mean NEVER AGAIN FOR ANYONE!”^{xxxi}

The NGO Campaign Against IHRA

As a powerful tool for identifying various forms of antisemitic behavior, the IHRA Working Definition exposes the hatred and animus underpinning the “Durban strategy” and the NGOs implementing it.

Concurrent to an increasing number of states, state-entities, local jurisdictions, and public institutions adopting IHRA, anti-Israel NGOs and their allies seek to blunt these developments by undermining the IHRA Working Definition and lobbying against its adoption by governments, the UN, public institutions, and social media companies.

As demonstrated by the intense attacks on Israel’s right to exist and numerous initiatives to harm it and its allies – those discussed in this testimony represent a small percentage of the examples involving NGOs – anti-IHRA efforts are largely self-serving, as NGOs seek to shield themselves from scrutiny and criticism. For instance, on April 3, 2023, HRW, Al-Haq, Amnesty International and their NGO allies published a letter to the UN Secretary-General, urging the UN to reject the IHRA Working Definition.^{xxxii} In this text, the signatories acknowledge that their motivation is to forestall widespread recognition that much of their activity related to Israel is considered antisemitic, noting that the IHRA Working Definition “opens the door to labeling as antisemitic... findings of major Israeli, Palestinian and global human rights organizations that Israeli authorities are committing the crime against humanity of apartheid against Palestinians,” as well as NGO-supported efforts “to transform Israel from a Jewish state into a multiethnic state.”

Europe – IHRA Implementation but anti-Israel NGO Funding

In the context of NGO-generated antisemitism, the role of Europe cannot be ignored. As noted above, the EU and European governments are major funders of many of the most blatant and heinous organizations working to dismantle Israel, bestowing both financial largesse, as well as access and respectability to extremists.

In all of the thematic examples described in this testimony, from denying Israel's right to exist, to targeted economic and lawfare efforts, to manipulating the UN to promote sanctions, European government-funded organizations are key players.

European policy has not been monolithic, with different governments, ministries, parliaments, and constituencies advancing different agendas.

On the positive side, 30 European countries have adopted the IHRA Working Definition, as have the European Union's Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and the Council of Europe.^{xxxiii}

Encouragingly, in January 2021, the European Commission published a "Handbook for the practical use of the IHRA Working Definition of Antisemitism," which relates the definition "to the contexts of real-world antisemitic incidents and crimes" and illustrates "good practices in the application" of the definition. A section is devoted to how the definition can "help direct funding to civil society organisations and human rights organisations."

Additionally, a series of parliamentary and governmental decisions, resolutions, and directives in Switzerland,^{xxxiv} France,^{xxxv} Germany,^{xxxvi} the Netherlands,^{xxxvii} and Denmark^{xxxviii} have instituted funding guidelines denying funds – in principle if not always in practice – to NGOs that engage in antisemitism, promote BDS, or deny Israel's right to exist.

Conclusion

NGOs claiming to act in the name of human rights are leading forces behind modern manifestations of antisemitism, in particular as they pertain to denying the Jewish People self-determination, delegitimizing Israel, and working to dismantle the Jewish State. This not only harms Israel, its allies, and Jews around the world, but it also distorts and perverts the cause of universal human rights.

Effectively confronting this NGO antisemitism first requires building consensus on the basic definitional elements. The IHRA framework has clear value as a yardstick for evaluating whether a particular statement or incident is marked by antisemitism, and where hatred of Jews is expressed through anti-Israel sentiment.

NGO Monitor recommends that governments explicitly address antisemitism by developing rigorous procedures for vetting of potential NGO partners to ensure that public funds are not awarded to organizations that advance antisemitic discourse.

Likewise, as NGOs serve in key roles as UN implementing partners, coordinators of UN-sponsored operations, and data collectors and analysts for UN agencies, donor governments should extend their bilateral vetting procedures to cover their support for the UN.

Similarly, governments and businesses should conduct thorough and independent evaluations of conflict-related developments when formulating policy, not relying on publications of politicized anti-Israel actors seeking to harm the Jewish State.

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