

## Human Rights Watch Spins Another Israel-hater Into a Hero

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One would think that someone who openly supports terror attacks on Israeli civilians would be disqualified for a human rights award. Remarkably, however, Human Rights Watch answered that question in the affirmative last week when it stood by its nominee for the Martin Ennals Award for Human Rights Defenders, an Egyptian blogger and activist named Mona Seif. She concludes many of her tweets with “F–k Israel” and passionately defends Palestinian terrorism, including Hamas rocket attacks on Israeli civilians, as heroic “resistance.”

Human Rights Watch’s endorsement fits with a disturbing pattern of immoral behavior under the leadership of Ken Roth: The group downplays the offenses of Middle East dictators and terrorists while obsessively condemning the region’s one liberal democracy, Israel.

In recent years, Human Rights Watch has embraced the Ghaddafi family as “human rights reformers”, raised funds in Saudi Arabia to battle (in the words of its Middle East director) “pro-Israel pressure groups”, and employed a collector of Nazi memorabilia as its “senior military analyst”.

In these and other ways, HRW’s perverse concept of human rights activism is destroying the very ethical principles that the group claims to promote. Those principles must include zero tolerance for terrorism – yet for Roth, the contradiction between the principles of universal human rights and support for hate and terror is simply a matter of spin.

Challenged over his group’s support for Seif, Roth said, “I haven’t seen anything indicating that by ‘resistance’ Mona means attacking civilians.” When it comes to anti-Semitism and terrorism against Israel, there is much that Roth chooses not to see.

In 2001 and 2002, while Palestinian suicide bombers murdered hundreds and maimed many more, Roth said nothing. When confronted, he provided the absurd excuse that such violence was not under the purview of his organization, because it was committed by a “non-state actor” and therefore not a violation of international law. This elicited further ridicule; HRW finally produced a single report condemning such attacks, but erased Yasir Arafat’s central involvement– the PLO leader was the main “non-state actor” Roth was seeking to protect. The strongest criticism he could voice was that “President Arafat and the PA leadership” were unwilling “to deploy the criminal justice system to deter the suicide bombings...” – as if Arafat was not behind them.

On occasion, the personal roots of Roth’s indifference to terror and his obsession with attacking Israel spills out. In 2006, he condemned Israel’s response to Hezbollah terror attacks in language which speaks for itself: “An eye for an eye – or, more accurately in this case, twenty eyes for an eye – may have been the morality of some more primitive moment. But it is not the morality of international humanitarian law.” The New York Sun decried this statement as a “slur on the Jewish religion itself that is breathtaking in its ignorance... To suggest that Judaism is a ‘primitive’ religion incompatible with contemporary morality is to engage in supersessionism, the de-legitimization of Judaism, the basis of much antisemitism.”

Roth's moral blindness is also reflected in his long relationship with Richard Falk, a "9/11 Truther" (he claims the U.S. government was involved in planning or executing the attacks). Until recently, Falk sat on HRW's prestigious Santa Barbara, Calif. Committee. For many years, Roth "did not see" Falk's ideological hatred of the U.S. and Israel, which often spilled over into antisemitism. In December 2012, officials from the US and UK governments condemned Falk for his antisemitism, prompting HRW to finally disassociate with him.

Roth has been quick to embrace Islamists and "not see" their misogyny, antisemitism, and disdain for human rights. In 2012 he endorsed the Muslim Brotherhood in Tunisia and Egypt. In response, the heads of seventeen human rights groups published a letter criticizing him for failing "to call for the most basic guarantee of rights—the separation of religion from the state. You ... are so unconcerned with the rights of women, gays, and religious minorities that you mention them only once. ... Are we really going to set the bar that low?" The letter concluded that Roth's is "the voice of an apologist, not a senior human rights advocate."

Even HRW insiders and officials have noted that Roth's priorities are "highly politicized." A long-time senior colleague characterized his approach to human rights advocacy as "picking and choosing cases and priorities, and engaging with or rejecting this or that regime...." Instead of going "where the violations are", she noted that Roth was "endlessly balancing the saddle bags—which in the case of HRW has often meant especially focusing on Israel because it can."

For these reasons, Robert Bernstein, HRW's founder, took the painful step of disowning his own organization after Roth embraced totalitarian Arab regimes and twisted the objective from opening closed societies to closing open societies. In a recent speech at Hebrew Union College, where he was awarded the Bernard Heller prize, Bernstein categorized HRW and similar organizations as a "group of litigator lawyers playing a game of 'Gotcha!' mostly with the Israeli Defense Forces..." Bernstein founded a new group, Advancing Human Rights in the effort to reverse the moral erosion.

In this context, Roth's role in selecting Mona Seif as a finalist for a prestigious "human rights award" fits a longstanding pattern. For HRW under Ken Roth, endorsing terrorism – so long as it's against Israel – is no disqualification from being lauded as a human rights champion. When the history of the degeneration of the human rights movement into a politically radical and morally obtuse failure is written, Roth will be a central figure.

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