

Nothing to Celebrate: International Human Rights Day 2016



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2016 was another dismal year for freedom, and there is little to celebrate on International Human Rights Day. The continued carnage in Syria has destroyed millions of lives, and as the Assad-Russia-Iran-Hezbollah alliance takes more territory, any remaining hope has all but disappeared. The tragic flood of refugees fleeing the Middle East has increased racist responses in Europe and elsewhere. In Venezuela, the tyranny of oppression and repression launched by Hugo Chavez has outlasted him, and the reign of terror continues. At the same time, 2016 marked a major rise in antisemitic attacks in the US and Europe, from both the left and right of the political and social fringes.

Reflecting this sad reality, Human Rights Day — which marks the anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Genocide Conventions on December 10 1948 — highlights the failures of the organizations that ostensibly protect and defend these values. Ignoring the pleas of victims around the world, the agenda of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is controlled by some of the worst violators, including Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Cuba, Russia, Venezuela and China. In turning away from the real suffering, officials of the UNHRC routinely exploit the rhetoric of international law to obsessively target Israel. Referring to the systematic double standards that make a mockery of universality, US Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power acknowledged that the bias is based on “Israel as an idea... Israel is just not treated like other countries.”

In addition, hundreds of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) claiming to promote human rights, including superpowers such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW) and the French– FIDH (Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme), have become accomplices in promoting this immorality. From small voluntary groups founded to support political prisoners, they have evolved into a powerful industry with annual budgets of tens and even hundreds of millions of dollars. To keep the money flowing and expand their resources and power, a number of NGOs have made alliances with dictatorships. A few years ago, HRW held a fundraising event in Saudi Arabia, and referred to Libyan dictator Ghaddafi as a “human rights reformer”.

Instead of fighting for freedom in closed societies, the ideologues who run these organizations focus their indignation on democracies, claiming legal and military expertise that they do not possess to attack the responses of western countries to terror. Radical NGOs share responsibility for undermining the International Criminal Court’s legitimacy and pushing it to adopt a political agenda, like the UNHRC, in order to target Israel.

Detailed analyses of myriad NGO publications and statements demonstrate the systematic biases in these campaigns. Ken Roth, the head of HRW, cannot bring himself to condemn the genocidal rhetoric of the Iranian regime. Busy cavorting in Davos and other celebrity hot spots, Roth and his counterparts from other NGOs parrot slogans and clichés without offering constructive and realistic responses to complex crises.

In 2016, the NGO network expanded the campaigns that exploit human rights and international law as ideological platforms used to attack Western democracies and open societies. The New York-based Rockefeller Brothers Fund (RBF) has joined the fray, providing generous financial support to radical groups. These grantees systematically erase terrorism — the primary threat to human rights — and demonize security measures designed to prevent such attacks, in order to promote a consistently anti-western and anti-democratic agenda. RBF’s misdirected largesse has empowered a

number of groups, such as the American Friends Service Committee and the misnamed Jewish Voice for Peace, that promote a version of radical “intersectionality” that merges movements such as Black Lives Matter with anti-Israel demonization.

In contrast to the values of tolerance and pluralism that ostensibly accompany the promotion of human rights agendas, many of these activists are bullies who exploit their power to intimidate those with different views. In contrast, organizations that focus their energies on promoting human rights in closed societies do not enjoy this largesse.

In Europe, human rights organizations and policies are similarly distorted. In a number of cases, taxpayer funds are doled out without due diligence, resulting in millions of euros, pounds, and krona going to groups that mix the language of moral principles with links to terrorist groups. Sweden, Holland, Denmark and Switzerland give millions annually to the “Human Rights and International Law Secretariat” which, in turn, gives the money to a number of NGOs run by alleged members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine — a designated terror group in the US and EU. In parallel, European government and NGO officials responsible for promoting human rights sweep hate speech and violence at home under the rug.

Amidst these bleak developments, it is difficult to find a basis for optimism entering 2017. The best hope comes from increasing criticism of the leaders of the human rights industry that have lost the plot. In a number of parliaments and among responsible journalists, the officials responsible for making policy and providing funding designated for human rights are being held to account, which is an important beginning. In this process, the slogans and myths that are often presented to hide the failures and immoral agendas are increasingly exposed. As a result, perhaps by next year’s International Human Rights Day, enough will change to give us something to celebrate.