

How the UN report shot itself and human rights in the foot

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The report from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) on the 2014 Gaza conflict has no surprises: it is another pseudo-legal and immoral case of Israel-bashing. Like the discredited Goldstone Report and virtually every other UN “inquiry” on Israel, political NGOs (non-governmental organizations) provide the basis of the investigation and findings. In the UN report, NGOs appear on almost every page: B’Tselem is cited 69 times; Amnesty International, 53; Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), 50; and Human Rights Watch (HRW), 22. To anyone familiar with the political agendas of these NGOs, the UN’s latest “findings” – namely, condemnations of Israel – come as no surprise.

Like the NGO publications, the Commission of Inquiry report on the Gaza war is filled with unverifiable accusations based on the testimony of nameless witnesses. Although the Commission recognized that testimony from Gaza is unreliable, acknowledging “fears by Palestinian witnesses of reprisal by armed groups and local authorities,” in practice, the report relies extensively on such anonymous allegations. For instance, in the section discussing attacks on houses, witnesses are quoted on the most essential legal and moral questions, apparently without concern for intimidation or lying to prevent self-incrimination: “According to the witnesses, all of those killed were civilians”; “they insisted that there had been no military activity in the building.”

The latter claim is augmented by statements given by the same witness to PCHR, asserting “that no family member belongs to the ‘Palestinian resistance.’” Reading between the lines, we see that the eyewitnesses themselves were likely selected by NGOs, such as PCHR, and delivered to the UN investigators.

The NGOs cited by the UNHRC also lack expertise and access to crucial information. These shortcomings are exemplified by the “fact-finding mission” of the Israeli organization, Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHR-I), produced in collaboration with the Palestinian NGOs Al- Mezan , Gaza Community Mental Health Program and the PCHR. The PHR-I investigators “did not have access to [relevant] UNRWA facilities... They could therefore investigate neither the public health impact of displacement in these facilities, nor the allegations made by the Israeli government regarding the abuse of such facilities for military purposes.” Similarly, they had “no access to evidence regarding the conduct of Palestinian armed combatants within Gaza.” Yet, the UNHRC deemed PHR-I’s investigation credible enough to cite its findings 16 times.

These and other unreliable claims are found throughout the report. But it is the prominence given to the notorious Mads Gilbert, a Norwegian doctor solicited as an “expert” on Gaza health, which discredits the UNHRC on a deeper level. Gilbert has a well-documented history of abusing his position as doctor to promote hate and conspiracy theories, and is known to have blamed the 9/11 terror attacks on the “policy that the West has led during the last decades,” asserting that “the oppressed also have a moral right to attack the USA with any weapon they can come up with.”

Gilbert is also associated with the highly politicized British NGO Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP). Exploiting medicine, MAP plays a central role in the demonization war, accusing Israel of “indiscriminate attacks” and “collective punishment.” MAP also promotes the “ Nakba ” narrative in order to delegitimize Israel’s very existence.

While Gilbert provided several interviews from Gaza’s Shifa hospital during the conflict, he willfully ignored the simultaneous Hamas war crimes in that very place: rockets launched from the hospital parking lot, and evidence of Hamas military headquarters in the lower floors. These Hamas war crimes do not seem to bother Gilbert.

Responding to Gilbert’s fanaticism, ten internationally renowned physicians published a letter in the Norwegian newspaper Verdens Gang calling his views “extreme and disturbing,” concluding that “he exploits the medical profession to justify terrible violence.” It is unclear whether the Commission of Inquiry was aware of Gilbert’s views and was unconcerned by them, or whether it failed in its basic due diligence.

While Gilbert has voiced support for terrorism and participated in Hamas propaganda tactics, other contributors to the UNHRC report apparently have more direct ties to terror. The Palestinian group Al-Haq is led by Shawan Jabarin , who has been denied exit visas by both Israel and Jordan for his alleged ties to the PFLP terror organization. On July 7, 2008, the Israeli Supreme Court noted that Jabarin is “among the senior activists of the Popular Front terrorist organization.” These activities seem to be of no consequence for the UN: Al-Haq is cited 19 times.

This latest UNHRC inquiry and report is only as reliable as its sources of information. When these are overwhelmingly unreliable political NGOs, as well as those who support and facilitate terrorism, any true champions of human rights cannot take its findings seriously.