

# Will Norway help Palestinian NGO destroy ICC?

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Op-ed: 'Human rights group' using Oslo funds in pressing Int'l Criminal Court to target Israel

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The International Criminal Court (ICC) was established by the Rome Statute in 1998, with the important goal of bringing the worst tyrants and human rights abusers to justice. However, as an international body, it is subject to abuse for political purposes, as seen in ongoing efforts to use the ICC mechanism as part of the political war against [Israel](#). For the past four years, the previous ICC Prosecutor Ocampo carefully avoided such campaigns, realizing that political exploitation would mark the end of its independence and credibility.

But recent developments, through the efforts of a group known as the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR), whose activities are funded by [Norway](#), may lead the new ICC prosecutor to capitulate on this complex issue. In April 2013, PCHR issued a public statement demanding that the Palestinian leadership join the ICC for no reason other than to prosecute Israeli officials.

If the ICC bows to this pressure and begins proceedings against Israelis based on double standards and false claims, this will end its moral mission and turn this body into yet another political battleground.

This political process is also likely to destroy the efforts to renew negotiations towards Israeli-Palestinian peace, led by US Secretary of State Kerry. At the beginning of the current talks, Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas agreed to an Israeli request to suspend the political warfare in the ICC, as a confidence building measure, and the Netanyahu government quietly halted settlement construction. However, PCHR, with Norwegian funding, is pushing the ICC campaign, with or without coordination with the PLO, and if this continues, this will bring an immediate end to the Kerry mission.

While this is not the international role that Norwegian taxpayers and government officials seek to play, the funding and cooperation with political advocacy NGOs such as PCHR has unintended impact, much like "collateral damage" in a shooting war. The Representative Office of Norway in Ramallah is listed as one of PCHR's main sponsors (the annual amount provided is unclear) and Norwegian officials meet frequently with the PCHR leadership. In 2012, the leaders of this Gaza-based NGO met with Norwegian government officials, as well as the Norwegian Refugee Council, on at least seven different occasions, reflecting a high degree of cooperation. PCHR is one of the Norwegian government's main Palestinian partners, and every action and initiative promoted by the NGO is facilitated by Norway.

In this context, the campaign that PCHR is leading in politicizing the International Criminal Court as part of the effort to expand the demonization of Israel is of central importance. For many years, PCHR has used the façade of human rights to lead the international campaign designed to label Israelis as "war criminals." This is a form of soft-power or political warfare, adopted in the NGO Forum of the 2001 UN Conference in Durban, South Africa, with the explicit objective of "the complete international isolation of Israel."

In aggressively pursuing this attack, Raji Sourani, who heads PCHR, was one of the main contributors to the

discredited 2009 report that falsely accused Israel of violations in responding to missile attacks from Gaza. Judge Goldstone, who headed the process, acknowledged that the allegations in the report were not based on credible evidence, but this has not stopped Sourani and PCHR from using Norwegian funding in pressing the ICC to target Israel.

PCHR's campaign began in 2009, when officials held a number of meetings with the previous ICC prosecutor Ocampo to discuss "the gravity of the crimes committed," and to call for the imposition of "ICC jurisdiction" over Israelis. In 2010, PCHR used the ICC Review conference in Uganda as another platform to target Israel, demanding that the ICC Prosecutor open "an investigation" and that the UN Security Council "refer the situation to the ICC." The campaign intensified in 2011. However, the allegations were not credible, and beyond the substance, ICC prosecutor Ocampo recognized that his organization would lose its international moral standing if he allowed it be used for immoral political campaigns instead of focusing on genocidal murderers. If the ICC went beyond its mandate, as demanded by PCHR, the [United States](#), Canada, Australia, [Britain](#) and other democratic countries involved in defending against terrorism would immediately call for the dismantling of his institution.

For Sourani and PCHR, with its obsessive focus on demonizing Israel, the consequences of these actions are of little importance. But for Norway, there is some importance to being associated with actions that could destroy both the peace process and the ICC. Norway was already embarrassed by the exposure of funding provided to Palestinian terrorists – in March 2013 it was revealed that Norwegian funds to the Palestinians were used to provide subsidies to terrorists serving sentences in Israeli prisons for their crimes. Despite longstanding Norwegian denials, it appears that on this issue, [Oslo](#) had apparently been "misled." And in February 2013 Norwegian public broadcaster NRK demonstrated that funding also goes to inciting hatred against Israel. In both examples, good intentions turned into damaging actions that fuel the conflict.

In Norway's efforts to promote a moral international agenda, including efforts to assist in the long-delayed peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians, and strengthening mechanisms to bring genocidal dictators to justice, the role of NGO partners such as PCHR is crucial. In some cases, NGOs that use the language of human rights and democracy actually conduct political warfare that has the opposite impact, and their agendas are counterproductive. Before it is too late and irreversible damage results, government officials and members of Parliament in Norway should review its overall policies of funding political advocacy NGOs in general and of PCHR in particular.

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