



# Blood libels and delegitimization

Anti-Semitic NGO campaigns, in the guise of attacks on Israel, have revived ancient theological hatreds

**WHEN THE** Church of Scotland resurrected theological anti-Semitism in its recent “Inheritance of Abraham” attack on Israel, much of the language echoed a Palestinian NGO called Sabeel.

Naim Ateek, who runs Sabeel, preaches “Palestinian Liberation Theology” in churches around the world, referring to what he calls the Israeli “crucifixion system” against the Palestinians. Similar language is used in the Kairos Palestine campaign, whose coordinator, Rifat Odeh Kassis, heads an NGO known as Defense for Children International – Palestinian Section (DCI-PS), which issues frequent publications falsely accusing Israel of violating the rights of children.

Sabeel, Kairos Palestine and DCI-PS are three components of a wide NGO network that propels the “Durban strategy,” whose objective is the “complete international isolation” of Israel as an “apartheid state.” This goal was adopted by 1,500 groups, including Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, during the infamous 2001 UN Durban conference on racism.

The main vehicle for this political warfare is the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, BDS, which employs a combination of historic anti-Semitism, including blood libels and theological attacks on Judaism, and “new anti-Semitism,” which targets Israel, the nation state of the Jewish people, through demonization and double standards. To deflect criticism, these NGOs often recruit marginal anti-Israel Jews, who play the classic anti-Semitic Pablo Christiani role of converts through the ages.

Contrary to their claims of engaging in “legitimate criticism” of Israel, these groups often cross the line, stooping to anti-Semitism as defined by the US State Department by “using the symbols and images associated with classic anti-Semitism to characterize Israel or Israelis,” “drawing comparisons of contemporary Israeli policy to that of the Nazis,” employing double standards that require of Israel “behavior not expected or demanded of any other democratic nation,” and “denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, and denying Israel the right to exist.”

According to these criteria, NGO use of anti-Semitic themes in attacking Israel is all too familiar. Powerful global organizations, such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, repeatedly use double standards in their “reports” alleging Israeli “war crimes.” Moreover, HRW included Richard Falk, the special UN rapporteur on Palestine, on one of its committees, ignoring his numerous anti-Semitic outbursts and the fact that in June 2011, he posted a cartoon showing a dog wearing a Jewish head-covering, with “USA” written on its body, urinating on a symbol of justice and devouring a bloody skeleton. In December 2012, following protests led by the NGO UN Watch, HRW was forced belatedly to cut ties with Falk.



SEBASTIAN PIRLET/REUTERS

An anti-Israel demonstrator in Brussels

The combination of false “war crimes” allegations and classic anti-Semitism also surfaced in an incident involving the Miftah NGO, headed by Palestinian activist Hanan Ashrawi and proclaiming to promote peace, “democracy and good governance.” In March 2013, Miftah published an article on its Arabic website attacking US President Barack Obama following his visit to Israel, and asking, “does Obama in fact know about the relationship between Passover and Christian blood?”

The funders of the NGOs that promote anti-Semitism share direct responsibility for this morally repugnant activity. Business magnate George Soros is the primary source of HRW’s budget, and Miftah’s funders include the European Union (via the Anna Lindh Foundation), Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Germany (via the Boell and Adenauer foundations), and Norway. Officials from these governments claim that they are funding “specific projects,” not infrastructure, salaries, websites and other activities. But these responses are neither credible nor moral. The US government-funded National Endowment for Democracy provided major grants to Miftah, but stopped in December 2012.

These anti-Semitic NGO campaigns have revived ancient theological hatreds, as reflected in the activities of the Church of Scotland, BDS and others. And, alas, such hatred directed at Jews and the Jewish state is accepted in a way that would be unthinkable if directed at any other racial, ethnic, or religious group. ■

*Prof. Gerald Steinberg, a professor of political studies at Bar-Ilan University, is the president of NGO Monitor, a Jerusalem-based group that monitors the Israel-related work of NGOs worldwide*