



## Amnesty International is losing its way

By GERALD STEINBERG & JASON EDELSTEIN

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As the organization celebrates 50 years, it is clear that something has gone terribly wrong with this once-respected moral watchdog.

Outside its London headquarters last week, Amnesty International (AI) hosted “Complicity in Oppressions: Do the Media Aid Israel” – organized by the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and the pro-Hamas group, Middle East Monitor Online (MEMO). In promoting the event, MEMO explained that “realities do not deter Zionists and the well-oiled pro-Israel lobby from purveying distortions of the truth as ‘facts’ in their hasbara (propaganda).”

MEMO also called Zionism a “pernicious ideology which is both racist and unjust – an ideology backed by governments across the Western world.”

As Amnesty International celebrates 50 years, it is clear that something has gone terribly wrong with this once-respected moral watchdog. Hosting such events, like allying with these groups, highlights the moral decline of the organization, which now embraces racial and religious prejudice. According to the EU, “claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor” is a form of anti-Semitism. Providing a platform for this ideology, therefore, contradicts the principles of a supposed human rights organization.

To make matters worse, these activities divert Amnesty’s resources away from real human rights abuses. As a result, the millions of people in the Middle East – from Algeria to Syria and Iran – whose human rights truly are being abused will continue to receive marginal attention from this self-proclaimed human-rights watchdog.

Instead of protecting these individuals under its original mandate, Amnesty has lost sight of these clear moral principles. In another example, in 2010, Amnesty suspended the head of its women’s rights division, Gita Saghal, after she condemned AI’s alliance with an alleged Taliban supporter. Christopher Hitchens wrote that Amnesty’s actions in this case exemplified the organization’s “degeneration and politicization,” reflecting “a moral crisis that has global implications.”

AMNESTY’S IDEOLOGICAL agenda was further illustrated following the January 2011 conviction and sentencing of Ameer Makhoul, head of Ittijah (a major Palestinian NGO promoting anti-Israel campaigns), for spying on behalf of Hezbollah. AI claimed: “Ameer Makhoul’s jailing is a very disturbing development... [He] is well known for his humanrights activism on behalf of Palestinians in Israel and those living under Israeli occupation. We fear that this may be the underlying reason for his imprisonment.”

This statement followed the 2010 blog post of Amnesty- Finland director Frank Johansson, in which he referred to Israel as “a scum state.”

Amnesty’s anti-Israel obsession is part and parcel of its wider ethical degradation. Since 2009, the organization has published seven reports on Israel and the “Occupied Palestinian Territories,” compared to its

miniscule output on totalitarian regimes, including only one report on Saudi Arabia, three on Libya, and one on Syria. The recent increase in short statements from Amnesty following the uprisings in these countries only highlights the lack of interest that preceded these events.

Amnesty's UK branch has a particular anti-Israel obsession.

On April 12, Amnesty-UK hosted "The Denial of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in the Occupied Palestinian Territories."

One speaker accused IDF soldiers of using glass shards to carve a Star of David into the arm of a Palestinian child. An audience member reported that after he challenged the source of the image depicting the Palestinian boy's arm, Amnesty-UK's crisis response and country priorities campaigns manager Kristyan Benedict said he would "smack me in my little bald head."

Another event, the "Russell Tribunal on Palestine," was held at Amnesty's London headquarters on November 8, 2010, dealing with alleged "Corporate complicity in Israel's violations of International Law."

The Tribunal, with roots in Marxist and anti-Western ideology, is a mock court putting Israel and its allies "on trial."

The Tribunal's "Support Committee" includes anti-Israel activists and representatives of extremist NGOs such as the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, and the Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions, among others.

Amnesty's Israel branch has been conspicuously silent in the wake of these immoral attacks. In contrast, real supporters of human rights have taken clear moral stands to protest the political exploitation of these principles.

The best example, in addition to Gita Saghal, is Bob Bernstein, founder of HRW, who broke with his own organization after officials such as executive director Ken Roth and Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

division director Sarah Leah Whitson obsessed over Israel and often ignored real human rights violations in the region. Whitson had previously solicited funds in Saudi Arabia to combat so-called pro-Israel "pressure groups," and also infamously predicted that Muammar Gaddafi's son, Saif Islam Gaddafi, would help "reform" Libya.

In an April 15, 2011 op-ed, Whitson hijacked rhetoric of the American civil rights movement, as well as the memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., to attack the US Jewish community regarding the Middle East conflict. In this short article, Whitson used the term "racist" and variations 23 times in reference to Israel and Jewish supporters.

Individuals who truly value human rights – in particular those associated with groups such as Amnesty that have lost their moral compass – should follow Mr. Bernstein's example and leave those groups. These organizations no longer uphold the tenets of morality and universal human rights.

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