

Schabas keeps demonizing Israel, despite ethics violations

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When Canadian law professor William Schabas was exposed as having omitted a blatant conflict of interest in applying for a UN position, he abruptly resigned as head of the latest commission investigating Israeli “war crimes.” However, he did not slink away quietly in embarrassment, or apologize and ask for forgiveness.

Instead, as a political warrior, his strategy has been to counterattack and spin the discussion in a way that his image is changed from attacker to victim. Schabas is an intense ideologue, dedicated to radical causes in which hostility toward Israel is at the top of the agenda. For many years, he has used his status as a professor of international law to advance this form of warfare, including serving as a PLO adviser. (This was the “minor point” he omitted in a UN application form.) His appointment as head of a high-profile UN investigation was a major achievement, and his removal a greater defeat.

To divert attention from his ethical violations, Schabas’ primary response is to dress himself in the clothes of the victim of an Israeli-led conspiracy. In a sympathetic article published in the *New York Times*, he complained of being targeted in “a stream of vulgar and violent emails and several death threats.”

Schabas has also tried to use his Canadian link to present his spin. In an interview last month with *The CJN*, he made the Pinocchio-like claim that there was “no evidence I’m biased against Israel.” But the article provided plenty of evidence. For example, the interviewer (reporter Paul Lungen) asked about a 2011 public declaration that Netanyahu “should be in the dock of an international court.” Schabas awkwardly sidestepped the specifics, instead presenting a convoluted attempt to redefine bias.

Similarly, a *New York Times* interview was headlined to reflect his spin: “Former Head of Inquiry Into Gaza War Says He Faced Pressure and Threats.” Again avoiding any recognition of his own ethical violations, Schabas claimed to be the victim of a vast Israeli conspiracy. Schabas then shamelessly exploited his partial Jewish background and the Holocaust, referring to himself as “a descendant of eastern European Jews on his father’s side, some of whom had died in the Holocaust, and that he was proud of his Jewish heritage.” This statement contrasts sharply with Schabas’ policy of otherwise omitting any such references. (In 2004, when Ken Roth, the powerful head of Human Rights Watch, was criticized for crusading against Israel, he also pulled out his Jewish roots and his father’s experience in Germany in the 1930s.)

The most revealing counterattack was made in close co-operation with Richard Falk, a leading anti-Israel warrior and official in the UN Human Rights Council until recently. (Full disclosure: I have debated and exposed Falk for many years, including his own abuse of the term “as a Jew,” and he recently denounced me as a “hasbarah specialist,” among other labels.) In fact, it was in his application to replace Falk at the UNHRC that Schabas lied about his conflicts of interest. With Falk’s encouragement, Schabas makes the absurd accusation that the “charges of bias against me were nothing more than a witch-hunt, something reminiscent of McCarthyism.”

Schabas would do well to take a lesson from Judge Richard Goldstone, who preceded him as the UN’s chief accuser versus Israel. Goldstone did not lie on applications or hide conflicts of interest. His failure was due to naiveté and the ease with which the anti-Israel NGO network exploited his Jewish connections for promoting false accusations and modern blood libels. But to Goldstone’s credit, when he belatedly realized this, he renounced the report and has kept silent on these issues ever since. Schabas is far from naïve, but having been caught in the act, he would be well advised to keep quiet and begin to atone for his sins – as a “descendant of Jews,” he has seven months until Yom Kippur.