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Middle East Round Table



February 23, 2012 Edition 8



Exploiting apartheid for political warfare

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In September 2001, the participants in the Non-Government Organization Forum of the United Nations Conference on Racism and Discrimination in Durban, South Africa, welcomed Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, distributed anti-Semitic literature, and adopted a declaration branding Israel as "a racist, apartheid state" practicing "a crime against humanity". This form of political warfare was led by the Palestinian leadership and the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and the text was written at a Tehran preparatory conference from which Israelis and Jews were excluded. The Durban NGO Forum marked the launch of another major round of political warfare against Israel, seeking to delegitimize Jewish national self-determination.

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The use of the



"apartheid" libel as the primary vehicle for de-legitimization is not directed against specific Israeli policies. The rhetoric and the campaigns on university campuses and in events such as "Israel apartheid week" explicitly target the existence of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. The political warfare accompanied by BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) campaigns is a direct continuation of the Arab rejection of the November 1947 United Nations Partition plan (General Assembly Resolution 181). This strategy was also embodied in the infamous 1975 UN "Zionism is racism" resolution (General Assembly Resolution 3379, repealed in 1991). In the words of Irwin Cotler, former Canadian attorney general, "Let there be no mistake about it: to indict Israel as an Apartheid State is prologue and justification for the dismantling of the Jewish State, for the criminalization of its supporters, and for the consequential silencing of their speech."

This campaign immorally exploits the suffering of the real victims of apartheid and racism, and transforms a political dispute into a racial conflict. The comparison was categorically rejected and denounced by Judge Richard Goldstone in The New York Times. Goldstone, who is a former justice of the South African Constitutional Court, wrote that, "In Israel, there is no apartheid. Nothing there comes close to the definition of apartheid under the 1998 Rome Statute" Goldstone added that "while 'apartheid' can have broader meaning, its use is meant to evoke the situation in pre-1994 South Africa. It is an unfair and inaccurate slander against Israel, calculated to retard rather than advance peace negotiations."

Many others who had experienced the real apartheid expressed similar views. Benjamin Pogrund, who was a journalist in South Africa, wrote, "Use of the apartheid label is

at best ignorant and naive and at worst cynical and manipulative."

This cynicism is illustrated by the immunity given to the highly discriminatory regimes that ruled many of the Arab and self-defined Islamic states for decades, but were not subject to serious investigation or criticism in the United Nations or by groups claiming a human rights agenda. In countries where women and religious, ethnic and other minorities are systematically denied equal rights, terms such as "apartheid" are never used. This language is also not applied to Egypt, despite often violent friction involving the Coptic minority, or to Turkey, which deprives its Kurdish citizens of equal rights.

The reality is that Israel's Arab citizens (Muslim, Druze and Christian, of different denominations) own property, have full voting rights, are proportionately represented in the Knesset, and are appointed to the High Court of Justice. Arab and Jewish patients receive identical treatment and are entitled to the same welfare and pension benefits and other state-provided services. While there is room for improvement in the distribution of income and other areas, as is true everywhere, the differences in Israel are not simply due to ethno-religious distinctions.

In the face of these blatant double standards, the power of the "apartheid" campaign is derived from resources that are available in both political and financial forms. Politically, as noted, this divisive agenda is supported by the Arab and Islamic blocs in the United Nations and associated institutions, providing numerous platforms as well as access to media.

Financially, the availability of significant European government funding for ostensible human rights organizations that actively promote the "apartheid" libel, including Adalah, Badil, al-Haq, and al-Mezan, is a major factor. Electronic Intifada, which is indirectly funded through Dutch government humanitarian aid, plays a central role in this political warfare, as do various Palestinian solidarity committees whose funding sources are entirely hidden.

Finally, the crude exploitation of the "apartheid" libel and the accompanying BDS campaigns are the antithesis of the mutual acceptance required for peace. Many Israelis see this form of demonization as the polar opposite of acceptance of a two-state solution that would acknowledge the legitimacy of Israel as the homeland of the Jewish nation. As Judge Goldstone wrote, "The mutual recognition and protection of the human dignity of all people is indispensable to bringing an end to hatred and anger. The charge that Israel is an apartheid state is a false and malicious one that precludes, rather than promotes, peace and harmony."- *Published 23/2/2012* © *bitterlemons.org*

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