

The Role of Human Rights Groups in the Conflict

Human rights organizations do vital work to expose injustice and suffering globally. However, they are far from infallible, particularly regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. On this issue, many influential NGOs have unfortunately succumbed to prejudice and flawed methodologies. Their claims must be examined critically, rather than simply taken at face value.

Robert L. Bernstein, Founder and former Chairman of Human Rights Watch (HRW):

"I came back convinced more than ever that Human Rights Watch's attacks on Israel as the country tried to defend itself were badly distorting the issues... I have found myself in strong disagreement with the policies and actions in the Middle East of Human Rights Watch and... Amnesty International"

It is inherently difficult to report fairly on human rights abuses in conflict zones.

- Amnesty International often bases its reports on anecdotes from civilians in conflict zones, though one of its top researchers who has worked in Gaza admitted these testimonies are frequently inaccurate.¹
- According to a former HRW researcher (one of the few with real military experience), HRW leaders misunderstand the realities of warfare and harbor unrealistic expectations for how it should be conducted.²

Prominent human rights groups have extensive records of prejudice against Israel.

- In 2011, Amnesty International hosted a talk about Israel by journalist Abdel Bari Atwan, who has said that he will "dance with delight if the Iranian missiles strike Israel". He also stated that a 2008 terrorist attack which killed 8 Israeli high school students was "justified".³ Deborah Hyams, one of Amnesty's lead researchers on the conflict, has slandered Israel, calling it, "a state founded on terrorism".⁴
- According to a 2010 study, HRW's reports focused on Israel far more than other countries in the Middle East, despite Israel's standing as the region's only functioning democracy.⁵ Prominent HRW officials spoke out

¹ Donatella Rovera, "Challenges of monitoring, reporting, and fact-finding during and after armed conflict," *Professionals in Humanitarian Assistance and Protection*, April 28th, 2014, at <https://phap.org/thematic-notes/2014/april/challenges-monitoring-reporting-and-fact-finding-during-and-after-armed-co>

² Ben Birnbaum, "Minority Report," *The New Republic*, April 27th, 2010, at <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/minority-report-2>

³ Marcus Dysch, "Amnesty to host anti-Israel Atwan talk," *The Jewish Chronicle*, April 28, 2011, at <http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/48307/amnesty-host-anti-israel-atwan-talk>; Adam Levick, "Atwan: I'll dance in Trafalgar Square if Iran attacks Israel," *Youtube*, August 3, 2011, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E93DaFoXx7w>; Jonny Paul, Jerusalem Post Correspondent, "Arab daily: Mercaz Harav attack was justified," *Jerusalem Post*, March 15, 2008, at <http://www.jpost.com/International/Arab-daily-Mercaz-Harav-attack-was-justified>

⁴ Gidon Shaviv, "Amnesty's credibility problem," *YNet News*, June 6, 2012, at <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4238719,00.html>

⁵ Gerald Steinberg, "Human Rights Watch Protects the Arab Tyrants," *Middle East Forum*, Summer, 2013, at <http://www.meforum.org/3564/human-rights-watch>

against this bias internally but their concerns were never seriously addressed.⁶ More recently HRW Executive Director Ken Roth was criticized in *Newsweek* for attacking Israel's efforts to aid earthquake victims in Nepal.⁷

- A number of problematic groups in the region are cited frequently and uncritically by media outlets. These include Al-Haq, Badil, Adalah, Addameer, and DCI – Palestine, all of which demand that millions of Palestinian refugees be allowed to “return” to Israel.⁸ According to President Obama this “right of return” would, “extinguish Israel as a Jewish state, and that’s not an option”.⁹
- Human rights group B’Tselem plays an important role in Israel’s democracy, but its credibility was severely called into question when one of its researchers was exposed as a Holocaust denier.¹⁰

Many problematic NGOs in the region are funded by foreign governments like the EU.

- Tax-payers spend hundreds of millions of dollars funding anti-Israel NGOs via the EU.^{11,12} 57% of the EU’s human rights and civil society budget for the entire Middle East is spent on Israel/Palestine projects, many of them led by prejudiced organizations like the ones mentioned above.^{13,14}
- The EU-funded Italian NGO Casa per La Race Milano hosts tours of Israel’s Holocaust Museum where tour guides slander Israel, claiming it commits the same atrocities as the Nazis.¹⁵ Other NGOs financed by the EU actively initiate and support illegal Palestinian development projects in the West Bank.^{16,17,18}

Former AP reporter Matti Friedman on the problematic actions of NGOs and the press:

“International organizations in the Palestinian territories have largely assumed a role of advocacy on behalf of the Palestinians and against Israel, and much of the press has allowed this political role to supplant its journalistic function.”¹⁹

⁶ Ben Birnbaum, “Minority Report,” *The New Republic*, April 27th, 2010, at <http://www.newrepublic.com/article/minority-report-2>

⁷ Steven A. Cook, “Why is Israel Criticized for Helping Nepal Earthquake Victims?” *Newsweek*, May 4th, 2015, at <http://www.newsweek.com/israel-criticized-helping-nepal-earthquake-victims-328190>

⁸ Al Haq, Defense for Children International, Al-Dameer, AAHR, Badil, Addameer, ENSAN Center, JLAC, PSC South Africa, PCHR, “Israel Continues to Deny Palestnians’ Fundamental Human Rights,” *Addameer*, December 9, 2009, at <http://www.addameer.org/etemplate.php?id=89>; Jeff Halper and Itay Epshtain, “In the name of justice: key issues around a single state,” *ICAHd*, September 13, 2012, at <http://www.icahd.org/node/423>; Adalah, “The Democratic Constitution,” March 20, 2007, at http://adalah.org/Public/files/democratic_constitution-english.pdf; Haneen Naamneh, “The Two Sides of Return: Palestine and the Refugees,” *Adalah’s Newsletter*, February, 2011, at http://www.adalah.org/features/land/Haneen_Naamnih_Two_Sides.pdf

⁹ Barack Obama, “Obama: Opposes ‘Right of Return Inside Israel,” *YouTube*, May 2, 2008, at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xatt3DmTXHo>

¹⁰ Marissa Newman, “Israeli rights group admits employee denied Holocaust,” *Times of Israel*, October 7, 2014, at <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-rights-group-admits-employee-denied-holocaust/>

¹¹ <http://www.frontpagemag.com/fpm/138664/how-europe-funds-israels-destruction-giulio-meotti>

¹² http://ngo-monitor.org/data/images/File/GERMAN_FINAL.pdf

¹³ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/d-il/dv/articleeufunding/articleeufundingen.pdf

¹⁴ Matti Friedman, “The Latest “Breaking the Silence” Report Isn’t Journalism. It’s Propaganda.” *Mosaic Magazine*, May 14th, 2015, at <http://mosaicmagazine.com/observation/2015/05/the-latest-breaking-the-silence-report-isnt-journalism-its-propaganda/>

¹⁵ <http://forward.com/culture/212738/why-european-ngos-and-the-red-cross-are-real-enemi/>

¹⁶ http://www.ngo-monitor.org/article/oxfam_calls_for_violations_of_international_law

¹⁷ <http://www.jns.org/latest-articles/2013/6/9/amid-global-focus-on-jewish-construction-ngo-counters-illegal-arab-building#.VdJAafVhBc=>

¹⁸ <http://www.ngo-monitor.org/data/images/File/European%20Funding%20West%20Bank%20Violation%20of%20International%20Law.pdf>

