NGOs and the New Antisemitism

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1. INTRODUCTION

The intensification of the Palestinian terror campaign in the 2000s has been coupled with a renewal of attacks on Israel’s legitimacy and Jewish self-determination rights not seen since the 1970s during the Cold War.¹ These attacks have been particularly severe in the United Kingdom, where senior Israeli officials have avoided travel for fear of being arrested for alleged “war crimes”² and anti-Israel boycott campaigns have a strong following in the country.³ Violence has also accompanied these initiatives. In one case, Israel’s second highest-ranking diplomat in Britain was assaulted by Palestinian protesters after lecturing at Manchester University in May 2010.⁴

This demonization is not confined to the United Kingdom, however. In August 2009, one of Sweden’s largest circulation dailies, Aftonbladet, revived the medieval blood libel, claiming that the Israeli army deliberately killed Palestinians in order to harvest their organs for profit.⁵ “Israel Apartheid Week” originated in Canada, where it continues to proliferate.⁶ The United States has also not been immune. In April 2010, the Israeli

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¹ In the early to mid 1970s, the Arab League boycott of Israel was at its height. Backed by the Soviets, the League launched a campaign in various UN fora to brand Zionism a form of racism. These activities culminated in the 1975 “Zionism is racism” General Assembly resolution.


⁶ Coalition Against Israeli Apartheid (<http://www.caiaweb.org>).
ambassador was heckled at the University of California, Irvine; at several other UC schools (San Diego, Berkeley), resolutions were introduced calling for divestment from companies doing business with Israel.\(^7\)

These incidents represent extreme manifestations of a “new antisemitism,” described by Canada’s former Justice Minister, Irwin Cotler, as “a new, globalized, virulent antisemitism” that “denies the Jewish People the right to live as equal members of the Family of Nations.”\(^8\)

An often overlooked aspect of this “new antisemitism” is the role played by human rights and humanitarian nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in contributing to the environment of demonization via politicized campaigns and lobbying. Disturbingly, many of these activities are funded by the European Union and European governments; large humanitarian Christian organizations that receive substantial government funding, such as Diakonia (Sweden), Trocaire (Ireland), and Christian Aid (UK); large foundations, such as the Ford Foundation, George Soros’ Open Society Institute, and Oxfam NOVIB; and even the progressive Jewish New Israel Fund (NIF).\(^9\)

These NGO campaigns can be traced to the NGO Forum at the UN’s 2001 World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa, which marked a major increase in the re-emergence of antisemitism.\(^10\) At the forum, officials from more than 1,500 participating NGOs, including international NGO superpowers, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, singled out Israel for condemnation, accusing it of perpetrating “holocausts,” “ethnic cleansing,” and “genocide,” and declared Israel to be a “racist, apartheid state in which Israelis [sic] brand of apartheid” is a “crime against humanity.” The Conference revived the hateful 1975 “Zionism is racism” slogan, repealed in 1991 by the UN General Assembly, but still promoted by anti-Israel actors. At Durban, antisemitic flyers were distributed at official UN events, including one featuring Hitler’s visage asking, “What if I had won? The good things: There would be NO Israel and NO Palestinian’s [sic] blood shed” (see Appendix, Image 1). Mass demonstrations included the chant, “What we have done to apartheid in South Africa, must be done to Zionism in Palestine.” In preparatory events held in Tehran and at the conference itself, Jewish and Israeli participants were intimidated or excluded from meetings.

As Professor Gerald Steinberg notes, “the NGO Forum’s Final Declaration established the ‘Durban Strategy’—‘a policy of mandatory and total isolation of Israel as an apartheid state,’ and cal[ed] for ‘the imposition of mandatory and comprehensive

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