

One Small Step

Is the U.N. finally ready to get serious about anti-Semitism?

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(Editor's note: Ms. Bayefsky delivered this speech at the U.N. at a conference on Confronting Anti-Semitism: Education for Tolerance and Understanding, sponsored by the United Nations Department of Information, this morning.)

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to you at this first U.N. conference on anti-Semitism, which is being convened six decades after the organization's creation. My thanks to the U.N. organizers and in particular Shashi Tharoor [the undersecretary-general for communications and public information] for their initiative and to the secretary-general for his willingness to engage.

This meeting occurs at a point when the relationship between Jews and the United Nations is at an all-time low. The U.N. took root in the ashes of the Jewish people, and according to its charter was to flower on the strength of a commitment to tolerance and equality for all men and women and of nations large and small. Today, however, the U.N. provides a platform for those who cast the victims of the Nazis as the Nazi counterparts of the 21st century. The U.N. has become the leading global purveyor of anti-Semitism--intolerance and inequality against the Jewish people and its state.

Not only have many of the U.N. members most responsible for this state of affairs rendered their own countries *Judenrein*, they have succeeded in almost entirely expunging concern about Jew-hatred from the U.N. docket. From 1965, when anti-Semitism was deliberately excluded from a treaty on racial discrimination, to last fall, when a proposal for a General Assembly resolution on anti-Semitism was withdrawn after Ireland capitulated to Arab and Muslim opposition, mention of anti-Semitism has continually ground the wheels of U.N.-led multilateralism to a halt.

There has never been a U.N. resolution specifically on anti-Semitism or a single report to a U.N. body dedicated to discrimination against Jews, in contrast to annual resolutions and reports focusing on the defamation of Islam and discrimination against Muslims and Arabs. Instead there was Durban--the 2001 U.N. World Conference "Against Racism," which was a breeding ground and global soapbox for anti-Semites. When it was over U.N. officials and member states turned the Durban Declaration into the centerpiece of the U.N.'s antiracism agenda--allowing Durban follow-up resolutions to become a continuing battlefield over U.N. concern with anti-Semitism.

Not atypical is the public dialogue in the U.N.'s top human rights body--the Commission on Human Rights--where this past April the Pakistani ambassador, speaking on behalf of the 56 members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, unashamedly disputed that anti-Semitism was about Jews.

For Jews, however, ignorance is not an option. Anti-Semitism is about intolerance and discrimination directed at Jews--both individually and collectively. It concerns both individual human rights and the group right to self-determination--realized in the state of Israel.

What does discrimination against the Jewish state mean? It means refusing to admit only Israel to the vital negotiating sessions of regional groups held daily during U.N. Commission on Human Rights meetings. It means devoting six of the 10 emergency sessions ever held by the General Assembly to Israel. It means transforming the 10th emergency session into a permanent tribunal--which has now been reconvened 12 times since 1997. By contrast, no emergency session was ever held on the Rwandan genocide, estimated to have killed a million people, or the ethnic cleansing of tens of thousands in the former Yugoslavia, or the death of millions over the past two decades of atrocities in Sudan. That's discrimination.

The record of the Secretariat is more of the same. In November 2003, Secretary-General Kofi Annan issued a report on Israel's security fence, detailing the purported harm to Palestinians without describing one terrorist act against Israelis which preceded the fence's construction. Recently, the secretary-general strongly condemned Israel for destroying homes in southern Gaza without mentioning the arms-smuggling tunnels operating beneath them. When Israel successfully targeted Hamas terrorist Abdel Aziz Rantissi with no civilian casualties, the secretary-general denounced Israel for an "extrajudicial" killing. But when faced with the 2004 report of the U.N. special rapporteur on extrajudicial executions detailing the murder of more than 3,000 Brazilian civilians shot at close range by police, Mr. Annan chose silence. That's discrimination.

At the U.N., the language of human rights is hijacked not only to discriminate but to demonize the Jewish target. More than one quarter of the resolutions condemning a state's human rights violations adopted by the commission over 40 years have been directed at Israel. But there has never been a single resolution about the decades-long repression of the civil and political rights of 1.3 billion people in China, or the million female migrant workers in Saudi Arabia kept as virtual slaves, or the virulent racism which has brought 600,000 people to the brink of starvation in Zimbabwe. Every year, U.N. bodies are required to produce at least 25 reports on alleged human rights violations by Israel, but not one on an Iranian criminal justice system which mandates punishments like crucifixion, stoning and cross-amputation of right hand and left foot. This is not legitimate critique of states with equal or worse human rights records. It is demonization of the Jewish state.

As Israelis are demonized at the U.N., so Palestinians and their cause are deified. Every year the U.N. marks Nov. 29 as the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People--the day the U.N. partitioned the British Palestine mandate and which Arabs often style as the onset of *al nakba* or the "catastrophe" of the creation of the state of Israel. In 2002, the anniversary of the vote that survivors of the concentration camps celebrated, was described by Secretary-General Annan as "a day of mourning and a day of grief."

In 2003 the representatives of over 100 member states stood along with the secretary-general, before a map predating the state of Israel, for a moment of silence "for *all* those who had given their lives for the Palestinian people"--which would include suicide bombers. Similarly, U.N.

rappporteur John Dugard has described Palestinian terrorists as "tough" and their efforts as characterized by "determination, daring, and success." A commission resolution for the past three years has legitimized the Palestinian use of "all available means including armed struggle"--an absolution for terrorist methods which would never be applied to the self-determination claims of Chechens or Basques.



Although Palestinian self-determination is equally justified, the connection between demonizing Israelis and sanctifying Palestinians makes it clear that the core issue is not the stated cause of Palestinian suffering. For there are no U.N. resolutions deploring the practice of encouraging Palestinian children to glorify and emulate suicide bombers, or the use of the Palestinian population as human shields, or the refusal by the vast majority of Arab states to integrate Palestinian refugees into their societies and to offer them the benefits of citizenship. Palestinians are lionized at the U.N. because they are the perceived antidote to what U.N. envoy Lakhdar Brahimi called the great poison of the Middle East--the existence and resilience of the Jewish state.

Of course, anti-Semitism takes other forms at the U.N. Over the past decade at the commission, Syria announced that yeshivas train rabbis to instill racist hatred in their pupils. Palestinian representatives claimed that Israelis can happily celebrate religious holidays like Yom Kippur only by shedding Palestinian blood, and accused Israel of injecting 300 Palestinian children with HIV-positive blood.

U.N.-led anti-Semitism moves from the demonization of Jews to the disqualification of Jewish victimhood: refusing to recognize Jewish suffering by virtue of their ethnic and national identity. In 2003 a General Assembly resolution concerned with the welfare of Israeli children failed (though one on Palestinian children passed handily) because it proved impossible to gain enough support for the word *Israeli* appearing before the word *children*. The mandate of the U.N. special rapporteur on the "Palestinian territories", set over a decade ago, is to investigate only "Israel's violations of . . . international law" and not to consider human-rights violations by Palestinians in Israel.

It follows in U.N. logic that nonvictims aren't really supposed to fight back. One after another concrete Israeli response to terrorism is denounced by the secretary-general and member states as illegal. But killing members of the command-and-control structure of a terrorist organization, when there is no disproportionate use of force, and arrest is impossible, is not illegal. Homes used by terrorists in the midst of combat are legitimate military targets. A nonviolent, temporary separation of parties to a conflict on disputed territory by a security fence, which is sensitive to minimizing hardships, is a legitimate response to Israel's international legal obligations to protect its citizens from crimes against humanity. In effect, the U.N. moves to pin the arms of Jewish targets behind their backs while the terrorists take aim.

The U.N.'s preferred imagery for this phenomenon is of a cycle of violence. It is claimed that the cycle must be broken--every time Israelis raises a hand. But just as the symbol of the cycle is chosen because it has no beginning, it is devastating to the cause of peace because it denies the

possibility of an end. The Nuremberg Tribunal taught us that crimes are not committed by abstract entities.



The perpetrators of anti-Semitism today are the preachers in mosques who exhort their followers to blow up Jews. They are the authors of Palestinian Authority textbooks that teach a new generation to hate Jews and admire their killers. They are the television producers and official benefactors in authoritarian regimes like Syria or Egypt who manufacture and distribute programming that depicts Jews as bloodthirsty world conspirators.

Listen, however, to the words of the secretary-general in response to two suicide bombings which took place in Jerusalem this year, killing 19 and wounding 110: "Once again, violence and terror have claimed innocent lives in the Middle East. Once again, I condemn those who resort to such methods." "The Secretary General condemns the suicide bombing Sunday in Jerusalem. The deliberate targeting of civilians is a heinous crime and cannot be justified by any cause." Refusing to name the perpetrators, Mr. Secretary-General, Teflon terrorism, is a green light to strike again.

Perhaps more than any other, the big lie that fuels anti-Semitism today is the U.N.-promoted claim that the root cause of the Arab-Israeli conflict is the occupation of Palestinian land. According to U.N. revisionism, the occupation materialized in a vacuum. In reality, Israel occupies land taken in a war which was forced upon it by neighbors who sought to destroy it. It is a state of occupation which Israelis themselves have repeatedly sought to end through negotiations over permanent borders. It is a state in which any abuses are closely monitored by Israel's independent judiciary. But ultimately, it is a situation which is the responsibility of the rejectionists of Jewish self-determination among Palestinians and their Arab and Muslim brethren--who have rendered the Palestinian civilian population hostage to their violent and anti-Semitic ambitions.

There are those who would still deny the existence of anti-Semitism at the U.N. by pointing to a range of motivations in U.N. corridors including commercial interests, regional politics, preventing scrutiny of human rights violations closer to home, or enhancement of individual careers. U.N. actors and supporters remain almost uniformly in denial of the nature of the pathogen coursing through these halls. They ignore the infection and applaud the host, forgetting that the cancer which kills the organism will take with it both the good and the bad.

The relative distribution of naiveté, cowardice, opportunism, and anti-Semitism, however, matters little to Noam and Matan Ohayon, ages 4 and 5, shot to death through their mother's body in their home in northern Israel while she tried to shield them from a gunman of Yasser Arafat's al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. The terrible consequences of these combined motivations mobilized and empowered within U.N. chambers are the same.



The inability of the U.N. to confront the corruption of its agenda dooms this organization's success as an essential agent of equality or dignity or democratization.

This conference may serve as a turning point. We will only know if concrete changes occur hereafter: a General Assembly resolution on anti-Semitism adopted, an annual report on anti-Semitism forthcoming, a focal point on anti-Semitism created, a rapporteur on anti-Semitism appointed.

But I challenge the secretary-general and his organization to go further--if they are serious about eradicating anti-Semitism:

- Start putting a name to the terrorists that kill Jews because they are Jews.
- Start condemning human-rights violators wherever they dwell--even if they live in Riyadh or Damascus.
- Stop condemning the Jewish people for fighting back against their killers.
- And the next time someone asks you or your colleagues to stand for a moment of silence to honor those who would destroy the state of Israel, say no.

Only then will the message be heard from these chambers that the U.N. will not tolerate anti-Semitism or its consequences against Jews and the Jewish people, whether its victims live in Tehran, Paris or Jerusalem.

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