



Suppressing UN Report On Israel's Move Toward Apartheid

By Allan Brownfeld

A UN commission report says that Israel practices apartheid against Palestinians. The report was published in March by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA). One report author is Dr. Richard Falk, a professor at Princeton University. Falk, who is Jewish, is the former UN Human rights investigator.

Foreign and domestic critics of Israel have used the term “apartheid,” the institutionalized oppression once practiced against the black majority in South Africa, to describe Israeli policies toward the Palestinians in territories occupied or controlled by Israel for 50 years. An executive summary of the report on the UN commission’s website calls it a study to examine, “based on key instruments of international law, whether Israel has established an apartheid regime that oppresses and dominates the Palestinian people as a whole.”

It concludes that it has, based on what it calls the fragmentation of the Palestinian population, Israel’s restrictions on Palestinians’ movements and other limits placed on Palestinians, but not Israelis.

The report was denounced by Israel’s UN ambassador, Danny Danin, who called it “despicable” and “a blatant lie.” He was joined by U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley, who called for the UN to immediately withdraw the report. Two days after the report appeared, it was no longer on the UN commission’s website. Falk Notes that: “Almost within hours of its release on March 15 our report was greeted by what can only be described as hysteria. The U.S. ambassador to the UN, Nikki Haley, denounced it and demanded that the UN repudiate it. The newly elected Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, quickly and publicly called for ESCWA to withdraw the report from its website, and when Rima

Khalef, the head of the commission, resisted, Guterres insisted.

“Rather than comply, Khalef resigned. Soon thereafter the report was withdrawn from the commission’s website, despite its having been published with a disclaimer, noting that it represents the views of its’ authors and not necessarily that of ESCWA or the UN.”

In Falk’s view, “What is striking about the response ... is the degree to which Israel’s supporters, in response to criticism, have sought to discredit the messenger rather than address the message. During my tenure as the UN’s Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian Territories (2008-2014), I saw the defenders of Israel attempt to discredit critics ... I never received substantive pushback regarding my allegations... Among my harshest critics were not only the usual ultra-Zionist NGOs but also Barack Obama’s diplomats at the UN, including Susan Rice and Samantha Power... It falls into a longstanding pattern of rebuttal that prefers to smear rather than engage in reasoned debate about important issues of law and justice...It remains our central hope ... that the widespread availability of the report will lead to a clearer understanding of the Palestinian plight and encourage more effective responses by the UN, by governments and by civil society. Beyond this, it is our continuing hope that people of good will throughout the world, especially within Israel, will work toward a political solution that will finally allow Jews and Palestinians to live together in peace with justice.”

The report argues that Israel has disguised apartheid as democracy. In the chapter titled “Demographic Engineering,” it states that: “The first general policy of Israel has been one of demographic engineering, in order to establish and maintain an overwhelming Jewish majority in Israel. As in any racial democracy, such a majority allows the trappings of democracy—democratic elections, a strong legislature—without threatening any loss of hegemony by the dominant racial group. In Israeli discourse, this mission is expressed in terms of the so-called ‘demographic threat,’ an openly racist reference to Palestinian population growth or the return of Palestinian refugees.”

The report’s section on “Israel Jewish-National Institutions,” declares: “Israel has designed its domestic governance in such a way as to ensure that the state upholds and promotes Jewish nationalism. The term ‘Jewish people’ in political Zionist thought is used to claim the right of self-determination.

“The quest of an ethnic or racial group for its own state amounts to a national project, and so Israel’s institutions designed to preserve Israel as a Jewish state are referred to in this report as ‘Jewish-national’ institutions. ... An interplay of laws consolidates Jewish-national supremacy. For example, regarding the central question of land use. Basic Laws: Israel Lands provides that real property held by the State of Israel, the Development Authority or the Keren Kayemet Le-Israel (Jewish National Fund) must serve ‘national’ (that is Jewish-national) interests and cannot be transferred to other hands.”

The authors’ goal was to investigate, “whether Israel has established an apartheid regime that oppresses and dominates the Palestinian people as a whole.”

“The analysis in this report rests on the same body of international human rights law and principles that reject anti-Semitism and other racially discriminatory ideologies, including the Charter of the United Nations (1945), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965). The report relies for its definition of apartheid primarily on Article II of the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment Of the Crime of Apartheid (1973).”

Riyad Mansour, the Palestinian ambassador to the UN, said that, “Rather than attacking the report, it would be better to reflect on the realities that the report addresses and how they can be remedied.”

This is hardly the first time that Israeli practices have been compared to apartheid. In 2007, John Dugard, a South African law professor who was a UN Human rights investigator, said Israeli laws and practices in the occupied territories “certainly resemble aspects of apartheid.”

Saeb Erekat, a lead negotiator for the Palestinians in negotiations with Israel, has used the term apartheid in referring to the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. When Israel approved new funding for settlements in June, Erekat said, “It is time for the international community to assume its responsibility toward the extremist government that openly supports apartheid and stands against the two-state solution.”

When he visited Israel on March 8, British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson told the *Jerusalem Post*, “What we are saying is that you have to have a two-state solution or else you have a kind of apartheid

system.” In Israel itself, critics of the occupation regularly use the term apartheid. Ehud Barak, the most decorated soldier in Israel’s history, warns: “As long as in this territory west of the Jordan River there is only one political entity called Israel, it is going to be either non-Jewish or non-democratic. If the bloc of millions of Palestinians cannot vote, this will be an apartheid state.”

Some Israelis have even used the term “fascism” to describe current policy. Zeev Sternhell, former head of the political science department at Hebrew University and a specialist on the history of fascism, was recently asked if Israel is now on the verge of fascism. He replied: “It’s a gradual process. We have yet to cross the red line, but we are dangerously close. We are at the height of an erosion process of the liberal values on which our society is based. Those who regard liberal values as a danger to the nation ... are the ones currently in power. They are striving to delegitimize the left and anyone who does not hold the view that conquering the land and settling it through the use of force are the fundamental foundations of Zionism. That’s why universal values and universal rights are enemies of the state, in their view.”

Around the world, Jewish voices decry what they see as Israel’s retreat from Judaism’s humane moral and ethical tradition. Speaking at J Street’s annual conference in Washington in February, Tony Klug, a special adviser on the Middle East at the Oxford Research Group, said that support for Israel’s “never-ending” occupation is changing the nature of what it means to be Jewish. “We used to be people devoted to justice,” he declared. “Now we have become enablers of Israel’s injustices.”

Klug told his audience: “Time honored Jewish ideals—Justice, freedom, equality, peace, mutual respect—have made an extraordinary contribution to human civilization. They lie at the very core of Jewish

identity ... We now face the major reality of a state that describes itself loudly and often to be Jewish as ... withholding fundamental human rights from millions of people indefinitely ... A standpoint that is in total defiance of quintessential Jewish principles ... When all is said and done, the bottom line is that the conflict with the Palestinians has dominated and distorted the Jewish world for too long. It is time to bring it to an end and stop the infamy of a half century of military occupation of another people and allow us to get back to the business of being ourselves.”

Rabbi Henry Siegman, a former director of the American Jewish Congress, says that Israel’s settlements have created an “irreversible colonial project” and involved having Israel “cross the threshold from ‘the only democracy in the Middle East’ to the only apartheid regime in the Western world. Denial of self-determination and Israeli citizenship to Palestinians amounts to ‘double disenfranchisement,’ which, when based on ethnicity, amounts to racism.”

Reserving democracy for privileged citizens and keeping others behind checkpoints and barbed wire fences, he states, is the opposite of democracy.

By helping to suppress the UN report about Israel’s inhumane policy toward the Palestinians and the manner in which this policy is approaching—or has reached—the level of apartheid, we do Israel no favor and harm our own interests in the Middle East. Such behavior only fuels the very kind of antagonism toward America that leads to the growth of terrorist groups such as ISIS. It encourages extremists in Israel to pursue their goal of annexing the occupied territories. **Z**



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