

# Getting Beyond Slogans of Palestinian Victimization

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This week, the members and staff of the International Development Committee in the British House of Commons are scheduled to come to Israel and the Palestinian Authority for a fact-finding tour. Such committees have a great deal of weight in the British political system, and their reports, including the recommendations, can lead to changes in funding levels and policy. The views expressed by the groups and individuals with whom the members of this committee meet can have a major impact on the report that they issue.

This committee oversees and evaluates the funding policies of the Department for International Development (DFID), the arm of the UK government that supports development assistance for what is referred to as "Occupied Palestinian Territories" (a widely used political term in Europe). DFID has allocated 30 million (\$57 million) for the Palestinians in 2006/07, of which half is channeled through the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA).

Some of this money is also given to the Temporary International Mechanism, used by the World Bank and the Quartet to provide assistance without involving the Hamas-led government. In a rare example of unity, Europe, the US and the UN have agreed on the need to withhold recognition or assistance until Hamas ends terror and rejectionism.

In addition, DFID allocates millions of pounds to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating directly and through partners in the region. Many of these groups focus on attacking Israel, rather than on peace and development of Palestinian civil society. The degree to which this money actually does any good, and the possibility that it is counterproductive and fuels conflict, are open to question, as violence among Palestinians and attacks against Israelis increase.

TO WRITE a credible report that goes beyond the decades-old slogans of Palestinian victimization, the members need to talk to Israeli victims of terror and see the evidence of how Palestinians have violated or ignored every commitment to act to prevent terror, including in the November 15, 2005 arrangement brokered by US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. They should see for themselves that one year after Israel's exit from Gaza, with all of the money invested in "development," the major industry is massive tunneling to smuggle in weapons, explosives and terrorists. After being shown how empty containers that carried aid into Gaza are taken back through the crossings with explosives and terrorists, they may understand the logic of Israel's security measures. And to recognize the necessity of keeping Palestinian fishermen from working, the committee should be shown how arms smuggling ships such as the *Karine A* and *Santorini* operate.

For these reasons, the committees visit to Israel and to the Palestinian Authority is necessary to fill in the distant evidence obtained through written statements, followed by selected invitations to testify in hearings on these issues.

The report from the previous round in 2004, and the sessions held to date in London, show that many members are sympathetic to the standard Palestinian position, as is the case with most of the British intellectual and political elite. In hearings on October 31, three of the four witnesses represented major NGOs that work closely with Palestinians and are funded by DFID - Christian Aid, the Quakers and Oxfam. These and other NGOs play a major role in the Durban strategy of demonizing and singling out Israel to promote boycotts and sanctions.

Although ostensibly dealing with economics and development, their focus is highly political. Israel is generally presented in simplistic terms as responsible for Palestinian suffering, via the "occupation," the "separation wall/barrier," closures and collective punishment. Their reports are patronizing, erasing or minimizing Palestinian terrorism and corruption, while portraying Israeli security policies as draconian and unjustified. The failure of the huge amounts of aid that have been poured into various Palestinian development schemes to show any successes is explained as being largely Israel's fault.

In the October 31 hearings that preceded the planned visit, the only different voice came from the Board of Deputies of British Jews, an important umbrella organization. (The Israeli government does not send statements or appear as witnesses to be questioned by legislators from other nations, just as the British government would not submit evidence to the US Congress or the Knesset committee investigating its behavior.) A single Anglo-Jewish voice, although highly articulate, is no substitute for direct contact with different Israeli and Palestinian views that go beyond the political slogans of Palestinian victimization and Israeli oppression presented by most NGOs appearing before the committee.

For these reasons, it is important that the committee members see and hear different civil society perspectives during its brief visit in Israel.

Not everyone will be willing to see the evidence that goes beyond the slogans of Palestinian victimization, but many of the MPs are fair-minded and will recognize the complexities, if given a chance to see the evidence. On this basis, they may recognize that for many years, this massive funding by British taxpayers has neither helped the Palestinians to relieve poverty, nor ended the terror and rejectionism that are the cause of the conflict.

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