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## Ending demonization, the Canadian way

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Gerald Steinberg , THE JERUSALEM POST

The abuse of human rights and international law as weapons to demonize Israel spread rapidly following the infamous 2001 NGO Forum of the Durban Conference. From the Jenin "massacre" myth to the Goldstone war crimes accusations, these attacks, which are often led by government-funded groups, have mushroomed.

Indeed, in a recent Knesset speech, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu recognized the extent of the threat, comparing it to the Iranian nuclear program.

But in sharp contrast to many other countries involved in this process, particularly in Europe, Canada has reversed course. The government in Ottawa has sought to end the flow of taxpayer funds, recently cutting funds for a group known as KAIROS that played a central role in the BDS - boycott, divestment, and sanctions - dimension of demonization.

In parallel, the current Canadian leadership also appointed new members to the board of a government organization known as Rights and Democracy. This group receives an annual taxpayer stipend of more than \$11 million, ostensibly "to encourage and support the universal values of human rights and the promotion of democratic institutions and practices around the world."

However, for many years, on the issue of Israel, this group discarded these principles by supporting the anti-Israel demonization process, including providing funds to radical Palestinian NGOs whose work demonizes and delegitimizes Israel. Two recipients, Al-Haq and Al Mezan, are among the leaders of the BDS and "lawfare" campaigns.

In sharp contrast to the pretense of defending human rights, Al Mezan repeats the Palestinian rhetoric of violence, including labeling attacks on Israeli civilians as "resistance." During last year's Operation Cast Lead, Al Mezan also accused Israel of "genocide" and "crimes against humanity." Other allegations included "apartheid," "ethnic cleansing," "massacres," and "slaughtering civilians." The organization employs highly offensive rhetoric, referring to Israeli "incit[ement]" to "holocaust (genocide)."

Al-Haq is led by Shawan Jabarin. The Israeli Supreme Court referred to Jabarin as a "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," whose alleged senior role in the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine terror group stand in stark contrast to his human rights claims. In Canada, Al-Haq pursued a lawfare case in Quebec against Canadian corporations, claiming that they were "aiding, abetting, assisting and conspiring with Israel" to violate the Geneva Conventions. This NGO also partnered with Al Mezan in seeking to have Defense Minister Ehud Barak investigated for war crimes in the UK, and they are preparing additional "war crimes" cases.

WHILE FUNDING for such groups under the facade of "Rights and Democracy" is bad enough, this governmental organization did so in secret, without providing any mention in its publications or activities reports. When the new board members uncovered this information, they were warned against revealing it by Remy Beaugregard, the President of the organization. Beaugregard and his allies refused to abide by the requirements of transparency and accountability.

According to the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, "the agency's board voted to 'repudiate'" the grants to Al-Haq and Al Mezan, which Beaugregard resisted.

But when he suddenly died last month, the illicit funding for groups like Al Mezan and Al-Haq got out. (Reflecting the close relationship, Al-Haq head Jabarin's condolence note is featured on the Rights and Democracy website.) Another issue to emerge is Beaugregard's November 2008 trip to Cairo, for which he spent \$9,431.99 in taxpayer funds (including \$6,562.79 for airfare to Cairo - costly even for first class). There he participated in a regional dialogue on "Freedom of Association," along with representatives from the Arab League and the Syrian regime, among others.

These revelations have triggered a sharp debate and growing criticism, and in response, Beaugregard's allies resorted to bitter personal attacks. Reportedly, "[s]taffers wrote a letter demanding three board members resign, saying they had mistreated Mr. Beaugregard." Ed Broadbent, a former Rights and Democracy president from the New Democratic Party, has taken the lead in rejecting calls for transparency and accountability.

In contrast, the board members who are not part of the old guard, and the government officials that refuse to bow to threats, have set an important example, which goes beyond the Canadian case.

Beyond the revelations to date, the next step would be the appointment of professional and independent auditors to prepare a full public accounting of all past activities, in order to clear the air and prevent future abuses. Additionally, NGO accountability must not be subject to partisan politics. Government officials and opposition leaders alike should ensure that the rhetoric of morality and human rights is not exploited for immoral political agendas.

In the past, Canada had followed Europe in allowing government-supported human rights and humanitarian aid organizations to be exploited for political warfare, including the demonization of Israel. Now, Canada has the opportunity to set an important example for Europe in reversing this process, and ending the damage that has been done. The developments at Rights and Democracy highlight the need for a sweeping review of all NGO funding provided under the banner of human rights.

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