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October 2005

How UN Bodies Undermine Chances for Middle East Peace:

Operations of the United Nations Anti-Israel Propaganda Apparatus During the 59th Session of the UN General Assembly: September 2004-August 2005

AJIRI's first report (July 2005) described the UN-financed anti-Israel propaganda apparatus operated by the Secretariat's Division for Palestinian Rights (DPR) and two General Assembly committees: the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People (SCIIHRP).

These three UN groups have enlisted a wide network of more than 700 non-government organizations (NGOs) to extend their reach.* In addition, several other UN agencies with broader mandates (such as the UN Department of Public Information) join in the attacks on Israel. Much of their output has an anti-American thrust as well.

At a time when there is a chance for a two-state solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict -- and thus for achieving a genuine peace -- it is unfortunate and in fact dangerous that the UN-sponsored and UN-funded worldwide propaganda campaign against Israel encourages Palestinian extremists and their supporters, whose goal remains the liquidation of the State of Israel. Shutting down this propaganda apparatus is necessary for true UN reform, and essential if the UN is to play a constructive role in support of a major United States foreign policy goal: a peaceful settlement in the Middle East.

This follow-up study describes the work of this apparatus during the 59th Session of the UN General Assembly, from September 2004 through August 2005. All information is drawn from official UN documents or UN websites.

Readers of this report might assume that the activities described here are those of hard-line Palestinian action organizations. In fact, this anti-Israel venom emanates from the United Nations, whose Charter calls for it to serve as "a centre for harmonizing the actions of nations" and provides that officials of the Secretariat "shall refrain from any action which might reflect on their position as international officials responsible only to the Organization." **Moreover, the UN budget projects expansion of these anti-Israel and anti-American activities in the 2006-2007 period.**

* Criteria for NGO accreditation to CEIRPP: "The NGO should...support...the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily its right to self determination;...[and] have demonstrated that it has concerted programmes or the serious intent to establish such...in support of the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

The Year-Round Worldwide Propaganda Effort

(1) September 13-14, 2004 -- New York

This NGO conference, convened by CEIRPP/DPR under the title “Ending the Occupation,” was so radically anti-Israel that (according to *NGO Monitor’s* Special Edition, 5 October 2004), “to their credit, the larger human rights organizations, such as Amnesty, Human Rights Watch and Christian Aid, stayed away.”

The purpose of the meeting was to develop a concrete public relations plan for the participating NGO’s. Anti-Israel themes intermingled with anti-US statements, as in the comments of the American Co-Chair of the International Coordinating Network for Palestine: that the “Quartet” (the U.S., Russia, the EU and the UN) charged with responsibility for implementing the road map toward a Middle East settlement was “in many ways a fake ... because one power had too much power.” She also referred to “two illegal occupations”: Israel in the West Bank/Gaza and the US in Iraq. The PLO’s UN representative used this opportunity to declare that the “Disengagement Plan of Ariel Sharon...violated international law.” Other participants called for a “sporting, cultural and economic boycott” of Israel; one called Israel a nation “of savage disposition.”

The Conference adopted a Plan of Action calling for “highlighting Israel’s participation in intergovernmental organizations for the purpose of stopping it;” organizing “international protests against occupation of Iraq and Palestine;” demonstrating at meetings of the European Union; and advancing “inter-religious mobilization” and the “question of Palestine within the Global Peace Movement.”

(2) October 8, 2004 -- New York

Issuing its Annual Report for the previous UN year, 2003/04, the CEIRPP spelled out its propaganda accomplishments for that period:

- Encouraging “all of the [non-governmental] organizations...to engage vigorously in order to ensure that Israel, the occupying power, and all governments and intergovernmental organizations live up to their legal obligations as spelled out in the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice;”
- Expanding UNISPAL (the UN Information System on Palestine), including its “uninterrupted presence on the Internet, notably via the UNISPAL ‘Question of Palestine’ interface on the UN home page, accessed under ‘Peace and Security’ ...;”
- Actions of the UN Department of Public Information to “implement its special information programme on Palestine;”
- Six international meetings and conferences held under its auspices.

(3) October 11-14, 2004 -- Beirut

This meeting was a forum of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ECSWA) on the subject of “Rehabilitation and Development in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.” One might expect it to address actual development issues such as housing construction, establishment of funds for small businesses, or training in finance. That was indeed done, but not without a significant dose of Israel-bashing.

Participants contended that development cannot take place under conditions of occupation, and praised “solidarity organizations” (NGO’s) as “the largest group of institutions working with the Palestinians.” It was noted that they have “sprung up throughout Europe, Canada, the United States, South Africa and elsewhere;” that they are active on university campuses in the U.S. and U.K., and at European parliaments; and that their agenda includes working to “hold governments accountable for their foreign policy as it relates to Israel and Palestine and corporations accountable for their investments.”

(4) November 8, 2004 -- New York

At this meeting, the UNGA Fourth (Special Political and Decolonization) Committee considered the report of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices (SCHIRPP) which is chaired by Malaysia. The opening sentence of the UN press release on the report states, “During the past year, not a single minute has passed during which Israel had not deliberately engaged in the violation of international law, including humanitarian law and human rights law, the Permanent Observer of Palestine told the Committee.”

(5) January 17, 2005 -- New York

At its 284th Meeting, the CEIRPP began 2005 by restating its goals and adopting its work program. Once again, the goals were “heightening international awareness of the root cause of the conflict,” namely “Israeli occupation;” and “mobilizing international solidarity with the Palestinian people.” The work program directed the Committee's chair to participate in intergovernmental and other conferences advancing the Palestinian cause; its leadership was to consult with governments and intergovernmental organizations including the EU, Non-Aligned Movement and League of Arab States; the Committee was to maintain contact with the Palestinian Authority, and was to organize UN and civil society (NGOs) international meetings on Palestine.

(6) March 8-9, 2005 -- Geneva

The theme of this UN International Meeting convened by the CEIRPP was “Implementing the ICJ Opinion on the Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the OPT -- The Role of Governments, Intergovernmental Organizations and Civil Society.” It was attended by representatives of 77 governments, 6 intergovernmental organizations, 11 UN system entities, the Inter-Parliamentary Union and 48 civil societies (NGOs) and

began, as most such meetings do, with a message from the Secretary-General, who said the time of the meeting was one of promise in the search for peace.

The final report issued by the conference and the discussion that preceded it contrasted sharply with the sentiments expressed in the message from the Secretary-General. The report and discussion focused on “the wall,” the security barrier being built by Israel to protect itself against terrorist attacks. Although the ICJ opinion was referred to as an advisory opinion, it was dealt with as if it were a binding statement of international law. In the final report Member States were urged to prohibit “individuals and entities” from participating in the barrier’s construction; the international community was called on to adopt measures to “persuade the government of Israel to comply with international law and the ruling of the ICJ;” and NGOs were encouraged to continue “educating public opinion” about the barrier.

(7) May 11, 2005 -- New York

At its 285th Meeting, the CEIRPP’s Chairman Badji (Senegal) reported on the “Peace in Palestine” NGO Conference held in Malaysia (March 28-30), at which he represented CEIRPP. He noted that this conference brought together more than 400 NGO participants from 35 countries and had been opened by the Prime Minister of Malaysia. He further reported that among the aims of the conference’s Action Plan was the establishment of an International Centre on Palestine for Civil Society in the South, to be located in Malaysia. The Centre’s objectives would include “forging close ties with Palestinian support groups in North America and Europe,” and developing an effective relationship with CEIRPP, DPR and the International Coordinating Network on Palestine.

The Action Plan adopted by the NGO conference states that the root cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is Israeli occupation “*from 1948 onward*” (*i.e.*, the founding of the State of Israel itself). Further, the plan states that this “oppression has existed for so long largely because Israel is protected by the United States, the world’s only superpower,” which makes engagement of NGO’s in the U.S. more important as a “site for strategic intervention.” Increasing use is to be made of the Internet, radio and television plays in the languages of the nations of the South, dissemination of information on “root causes” in community newspapers and radio stations in the U.S., focus on women and youth groups in particular, and engagement of grassroots organizations in the U.S. The Centre will study how NGOs in the South can organize selective boycotts and divestment directed against Israel. It will “strive to ensure that the UN, not the U.S., plays the dominant diplomatic role” with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and promises to “struggle relentlessly for the emergence of a multi-polar world which will facilitate deliverance of justice for Palestinians.”

While this conference was not organized by the CEIRPP, its chair, as noted, participated in its work and reported on the Centre’s intention to develop “an effective relationship” with the CEIRPP and DPR.

(8) June 13, 2005 -- Cairo

The International Media Seminar on “Reinvigorating the Peace Process: the Role of International and Regional Actors in Facilitating a Just and Lasting Peace in the Middle East” was organized by the UN's Department of Public Information, in cooperation with Egypt's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. As usual, the opening statement sent by the Secretary-General was more moderate than much of what followed. His plea for the media to refrain from myths, stereotypes and hate propaganda was ignored in many of the four panels that followed. One speaker declared that Israel “lived on blood and wanted to suck the blood of the Arabs.” This, rather than “avoiding dehumanizing language,” was the tone of this panel.

(9) June 21, 2005 -- New York

Following its 286th meeting, the CEIRPP issued a press release that consisted almost entirely of the statement of the Palestinian Observer Mission. It asserts that Israel continues to violate international law with settlements and “the wall,” and says Israel plans to establish an “apartheid type” road.

(10) August 23, 2005 -- New York

A report issued by the Secretary-General on that date summarizes action taken by the UN in connection with the work of the SCIIHRPP. It is worth noting that the report reveals how other UN agencies make special efforts to spread the SCIIHRPP's anti-Israel propaganda in the Arab World. Thus, when the SCHIIRPP visited Egypt in June 2005, the United Nations Information Centre in Cairo publicized the visit, translating a press release and distributing it to major Egyptian and Saudi newspapers as well as to news agencies based in Cairo; organized a press conference for the SCHIIRPP attended by twenty representatives from major Egyptian and Arab newspapers; and arranged three exclusive interviews for Committee members with Egyptian newspapers.

In addition, other UN agencies publicized SCIIHRPP's anti-Israel program. The UN's Department of Public Information (DPI) issued 14 press releases on the work of SCIIHRPP; the UN News Centre, including its Arabic language version, regularly reported SCIIHRPP activities on its website; and the 2005 *UN Chronicle* included the Special Committee's deliberations in its "e-alert."

(11) July 12-13, 2005 -- Paris

The opening message of the Secretary-General to the “United Nations International Conference of Civil Society In Support of Middle East Peace,” sponsored by CEIRPP/DPR, told the participating NGOs that they are “building bridges of understanding and reconciliation between the Israeli and Palestinian people.” Once again, a UN-sponsored conference ignored the Secretary-General's appeal for reconciliation, and harshly condemned Israel.

Conference participants urged “greater U.S. and Israeli diplomatic isolation through the greater commitment of more governments everywhere to the Palestinian cause.” They further urged a focus on the ICJ opinion on the “illegality of Israel's annexationist apartheid wall;” work with civil society (NGO) organizations, parliaments, governments and the UN itself, especially the CEIRPP, to mobilize support for the Palestinians’ “right of return;” and linked the Palestinian issue to the U.S. occupation of Iraq – a new theme.

The American Co-Chair of the International Coordinating Network on Palestine said “the anti-war movement focused on the US occupation of Iraq has made the call for ending the Israeli occupation of Palestine a key component of the effort worldwide. That has ... brought the Palestinian rights issue to the centre of perhaps the most important and powerful global movement of the day.” A speaker from Delhi University added that the “international NGOs united with the Palestinian struggle” must become “part of a global process [of] promoting the United States' political defeat in Iraq” and “generating greater US and Israeli diplomatic isolation through the greater commitment of more governments everywhere to the Palestinian Cause.”

The Conference adopted an Action Plan which calls for a global campaign of boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel, deliberately modeled on the anti-apartheid campaign against South Africa. The Action Plan spells out the NGOs’ intent to “mobilize for and inaugurate this BDS campaign” in support of its goal of “bringing down the wall” and creating a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

(12) August 30-31, 2005 -- New York

The CEIRPP Press Release describing its 287th meeting announced that the “Palestinian Authority ... has fully demonstrated its ability to control the security situation [in Gaza] throughout this critical period,” and asserted that henceforth the PA “must be allowed to exercise control over its borders, crossing points, sea and airspace” and that there must be an “unhindered flow of people and goods into and out of Gaza.” Here again, this UN agency mischaracterizes the relevant facts and then presumes to decide issues involving Israel’s security against terrorist attacks which, under the road map, must be left to negotiations between the parties.

A second press release endorsed the Palestinian Authority's view that “political actions in the future must not be unilateral,” and that it “reaffirmed its sovereignty over the ... Gaza Strip, the West Bank and in East Jerusalem.” The Chair of CEIRPP reported on the July NGO Conference in Paris, noting its adoption of an action plan “urging international, national and regional boycotts, divestments and sanctions” directed against Israel.

CONCLUSION

Observers of UN proceedings are well aware of the harsh anti-Israel speeches and resolutions emanating from the United Nations General Assembly. But very few are fully aware of either the intensity or the geographic scope of the effort to demonize Israel, as shown in the above examples. What is also not generally known is the extent to which the UN's anti-Israel apparatus is used to attack the United States.

The proposed UN budget for 2006-2007 actually projects expansion of anti-Israel and anti-US operations by the Division for Palestinian Rights and two related UNGA committees: recruitment of another 30 NGOs; 50 Bureau meetings and 10 additional conferences, expanding their geographic reach to add meetings in Africa, Asia and Latin America as well as at previous sites in New York, Europe and the Middle East.

This anti-Israel apparatus is authorized and funded by annual votes of the UN General Assembly. It is important to note that a UNGA decision that raises a budgetary question requires a two-thirds vote to be adopted. Thus, the challenge for those who want to shut down this apparatus is to put together a blocking vote of one-third plus-one.

We believe that this can be done under United States leadership.

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