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Regrettably, the UN Remains Inhospitable to Israel

Recent media reports have suggested that the UN is gradually becoming more hospitable to Israel. Yet, a review of UN actions during the life of the recently-concluded 59th session of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) shows that that is simply not the case. No other country has been subjected to treatment remotely resembling the UN's treatment of Israel – and that pattern of isolation and condemnation continued in actions taken throughout the UNGA session that ended in September 2005.

Analysis of both the context and the content of alleged “improvements” makes it clear that these changes may alter appearances, but not the substance of UN decisions and actions affecting Israel.

As has been the pattern for many years, the 59th UNGA adopted more than 20 resolutions directed against Israel. For the 59th session the number of such resolutions was 21. The United States voted “no” on 19 and abstained on two of them. Three of the resolutions stand out as especially pernicious because they serve the purpose of authorizing the continued operation of the UN's anti-Israel propaganda apparatus. They were the resolutions that renewed the mandates of the UNGA's two anti-Israel committees and of the Division for Palestinian Rights, the center of the UN's anti-Israel operations.

During the 59th UNGA, this anti-Israel propaganda apparatus held international conferences directed against Israel in five different locations (New York, Beirut, Geneva, Cairo, and Paris). The General Assembly's anti-Israel committees met five times and issued three anti-Israel reports. Specific activities are described in the recent report of the American Jewish International Relations Institute (AJIRI), *“How UN Bodies Undermine Chances for Middle East Peace: Operations of the UN Anti-Israel Propaganda Apparatus during the 59th Session of the UN General Assembly, September 2004-August 2005.”*

The specific “improvements” to which attention has been called are recent developments that deal with atmospherics rather than with substance. To list them:

- (1) The UN held a forum on antisemitism, at which Secretary-General Annan said that “the United Nations’ record on anti-Semitism has at times fallen short of our ideals.”
- (2) A “condemnation” of anti-Semitism was included for the first time in the annual resolution against religious intolerance.
- (3) The General Assembly held a special session that marked the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. An exhibit on Auschwitz was installed in the headquarters lobby. Secretary-General Annan attended and spoke at the opening

- of a new wing at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Memorial in Jerusalem. Israel expects to propose a UN resolution on the Holocaust.
- (4) The Israeli Permanent Representative to the UN was elected Vice President of the UN General Assembly and has had the opportunity of presiding over it.
 - (5) Israel submitted its candidacy for the UN Security Council.
 - (6) Its Prime Minister was “warmly received” when he spoke to the General Assembly.

In view of the continuing activities of the UN’s in-house anti-Israel propaganda apparatus and the monthly Israel-bashing events sponsored by the UN throughout the year, do these alleged improvements really herald a new era? The answer is clearly “no,” as shown by the following analysis.

(1) Forum on Antisemitism

On June 6, 2004 a forum on antisemitism was held under the auspices of the Secretary-General. In his opening remarks, he emphasized that this was not to be a unique event, that it would be followed by other seminars that would deal with “other specific groups against which intolerance is directed in many parts of the world.” In calling attention to the problem posed by antisemitism, he conceded that “the United Nations’ record on antisemitism has at times fallen short of our ideals.”

Sister Ruth Lutt of the Sisters of Saint Dominic, a participant in the forum, dealt far more bluntly with the issue. According to the UN press release on the meeting, she stated that

“she was deeply concerned about the worldwide rise in anti-Semitism, particularly how that was taking new and insidious forms, specifically the ‘demonization’ of Israel. Make no mistake about it — that was anti-Semitism; just the same old sin wrapped in a new politically correct wrapper by a world that was all too willing to believe the worst about the Jewish State. Everyone knew all too well what could happen when that got out of hand, so something should be done about that now. Tragically, for most of 2,000 years of shared salvation history, Christians had not been a blessing to Jews, which had led to Jewish isolation and discrimination. She said it was time to very aggressively ‘unteach’ the sin of anti-Semitism.”

Professor Anne Bayefsky echoed that theme. She said that

“the seminar was taking place at a time when the relationship between Jews and the United Nations were at an all-time low, described the Organization as today’s leading global purveyor of anti-Semitism. The 2001 Durban World Conference against Racism had been a breeding ground and global soapbox for anti-Semitism. The Secretary-General’s criticism of Israel’s construction of a security barrier on the West Bank and its assassination of Hamas leaders had made no mention of Israeli victims of terrorism. The United Nations led the demonization of Jews

while deifying the Palestinians. The seminar could reach a turning point if the General Assembly adopted a resolution against anti-Semitism and the Secretary-General appointed a special rapporteur on anti-Semitism.”

These remarks were made at a UN meeting held in June 2004. The 59th session of the General Assembly started in September 2004, and as noted, the UN’s long-established practice of Israel-bashing continued undiminished. Sister Lutt’s suggestion for “unteaching” antisemitism and Professor Bayefsky’s recommendation for the appointment of a special rapporteur on anti-Semitism went unheeded. The seminar was an interesting event, with no practical results.

(2) “Deep Concern” about Anti-Semitism

The suggestion that the UN’s standard annual resolution on religious intolerance include a reference to antisemitism had been made in earlier years. In 2004, it was finally included in Res. 59/199, adopted on December 20, 2004. Anti-Semitism is mentioned only once in the resolution, as follows:

[The General Assembly] “Recognizes with deep concern the overall rise in instances of intolerance and violence, directed against members of many religious communities in various parts of the world, including cases motivated by Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and Christianophobia...”

There is no indication that this reference to anti-Semitism, linked to Islamophobia and Christianophobia (two newly-created terms) reflected a new spirit at the UN. Even the mention of anti-Semitism in Res. 59/199 was watered down by laudatory references to the Durban Conference on Racism of 2001, which degenerated into an attack on Israel and Jews. While Israel swallowed these references as part of Res. 59/199, it took a strong stand when a resolution to re-endorse the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action was before the UNGA on the same day, as Res. 59/177. The Israeli representative protested against adoption of the Durban resolution in strong terms, according to the UN press release:

“The representative of Israel said that the text lay in direct opposition to the principles it purported to defend. The history of the Jewish people was replete with examples of the most horrible acts of intolerance and genocide the world had ever witnessed, and the commitment of her country to opposing racism would not allow it to support the outcome of the Durban Conference. The text promoted a grossly distorted picture of events. This was disturbing, not just from the Jewish and Israeli point of view, but also from the point of view of any individual committed to the idea that the international community must work together to address the scourges of racism and racial discrimination.

“What had transpired at Durban had constituted a regression in attempts to confront those scourges, she said. Delegations, including those of non-governmental organizations, had singled out and slandered one country,

prompting her country's and the United States' withdrawal from the Conference.”

The United States joined Israel in voting “no” on Res. 59/177. It also joined Israel in voting “no” on two other resolutions directed against Israel, Res. 59/173 and 59/179. The first of these is entitled “The situation of and assistance to Palestinian children.” The UNGA has never passed any country-specific resolution regarding other children adversely affected by conflict and has most certainly not passed any resolution regarding the adverse impact of terrorism on Israeli children. But, using the pretext of concern for children, it criticizes Israel's defensive measures as “continuing assaults and sieges on Palestinian cities, towns, villages, and refugee camps,” and expresses concern about “the severely detrimental impact being caused by the unlawful construction of the wall by Israel” and the “psychological consequences, of the Israeli military actions for the present and future well-being of Palestinian children.”

“The wall” was also referred to in Res. 59/179, entitled “The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.” Ignoring the fact that the security barrier has played a significant role in saving lives of residents of Israel, including Israeli children, the resolution asserts that “the wall” built by Israel, “the occupying power, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, along with measures previously taken, severely impedes the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.”

Thus Sister Latt's concerns about the continuing “demonization of Israel... [which is] anti-Semitism, just the same old sin, wrapped in a politically correct wrapper” were clearly borne out by these unbalanced UNGA actions taken on December 20, 2004 -- all as part of a package of resolutions that included the text expressing concern about anti-Semitism.

(3) Memorial Events Dealing with the Holocaust and a Resolution on that Subject

A number of UN memorial events, largely involving the Secretary-General, have been cited as examples of the UN's new hospitality for Israel. There is no doubt of the sincerity of the Secretary-General's personal attitude. But as for the UN as an institution, one must be skeptical about an organization which commemorates the murder of Six Million Jews more than sixty years ago, when at the same time its actions undermine the security of the Five Million Jews now living in Israel – and when it holds an annual event, entitled “Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People,” to deplore the creation of the Jewish state through the Partition Resolution, UNGA Res. 181(II), adopted on November 29, 1947.

There is also discussion now of the possibility that Israel might sponsor a resolution on the Holocaust that might win approval. Here, too, we need to ask ourselves as to the value of such a resolution being adopted by a body that acts to undermine the security of Five Million Israeli Jews. Moreover, it is worth considering whether the introduction of this resolution could be counterproductive. Some Member States that are asked to stop voting against Israel are likely to say: “We have already voted for the Holocaust resolution and that is all that we can do.”

(4) The UNGA Vice Presidency

On June 13, 2005, the UN General Assembly elected Jan Eliasson of Sweden as President of its 60th session and elected as its 21 Vice Presidents the representatives of Angola, Armenia, Brazil, Central African Republic, China, France, Guinea-Bissau, India, Iran, Israel, Kenya, Malaysia, Mali, Myanmar, Pakistan, Paraguay, Russian Federation, Tunisia, United Kingdom, United States, and Venezuela. The election was uncontested. Israel was one of the states that WEOG nominated for the four slots allocated to it.

When the President of the UNGA is unable to preside over an UNGA session, the task of chairing meetings is rotated among the Vice Presidents. It was nice that WEOG allowed the Israeli representative to serve again as one of the UNGA Vice Presidents, after a hiatus of more than fifty years since Abba Eban served as Vice President. However, much more would be accomplished to end Israel's pariah status at the UN if WEOG were to give Israel full membership status in New York and would arrange for Israel's participation in the WEOG caucuses at such other UN headquarters as Geneva and Nairobi.

(5) Candidacy for the UN Security Council

Israel has announced its candidacy for the UN Security Council for the biennium 2019/20 – to be acted on thirteen years from now. Israel is a temporary member of the UN geographic group known as the West European and Others Group (WEOG). Other WEOG members have already announced their interest in serving in the years through 2018. Between now and 2018, many other issues could arise which would prevent Israel from being a candidate. By the same token, an opportunity for membership could arise sooner. What is clear is that Israel's unilateral act of asking for support to take over a Security Council seat on January 1, 2019 tells us nothing about the UN's hospitality for Israel in 2005.

(6) Sharon was “Warmly Received” by the UNGA

There is no doubt that Prime Minister Sharon was treated civilly when he spoke to the UN this September. (However, he most assuredly did not evoke the enthusiasm shown for President Chavez of Venezuela.) The fact that it is considered progress if representatives of the Arab states don't walk out when the Prime Minister of Israel addresses the UN shows how low the threshold has been set for UN hospitality vis-à-vis Israel. Media reports have noted that Prime Minister Sharon's speech was delivered in a hall in which “a tide of condemnatory resolutions has passed by lopsided votes.” Regrettably, there is no reason to assume that the UNGA won't pass further anti-Israel resolutions in the months immediately ahead.

CONCLUSION

In reviewing UN actions, it is essential to distinguish between those actions that affect life in the real world and those that are largely theatrical: symbolic acts without real consequences. A careful analysis of recent UN actions that have been cited as evidence of a more hospitable attitude toward Israel at the UN shows that these actions fall into the “theatrical” category. By contrast, during the same time period, the UN continued its incessant anti-Israel activities and destructive propaganda campaign in the real world, as documented in the recent AJIRI report.

The Holocaust has been a searing experience for Jewish people everywhere and for many non-Jews as well. It is appropriately commemorated by generations born after 1945. Yet, the contrast between substantive and merely symbolic actions is most sharply brought into focus by the UN’s treatment of the Holocaust. While the tragic death of Six Million Jews more than sixty years ago is solemnly commemorated – the UN continues at the same time its vigorous campaign to force Israel to take down the security barrier (“the wall”) that protects the lives of Five Million Jews now living in Israel.

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.

The UN can not be judged "hospitable" to Israel until the organization puts an end to its anti-Israel activities and propaganda. A necessary first step requires shutting down the Division for Palestinian Rights and the two related UNGA committees which direct the worldwide campaign against Israel. We believe this can be done under U.S. leadership.

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All information regarding UN resolutions is drawn from official UN documents.