



NGOs and the economic war

A formidable network of NGO officials and European diplomats is committed to go from product labeling to major economic warfare

THE EUROPEAN Union’s adoption of “product labeling” guidelines for Israeli settlements followed a long campaign involving numerous actors, including powerful nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Many of these groups are also involved in the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) movement against Israel and play a leading role in the frequent allegations of “war crimes” and “violations of international law” used to single out and demonize the Jewish state.

The strategy of punishing Israel to force policy changes has been pressed for many years by NGOs like Oxfam International, Amnesty International, the Paris-based International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and numerous others operating under the twin banners of humanitarian aid and human rights. Echoing the declaration adopted at the NGO Forum of the 2001 Durban conference against racism, these influential groups work closely with Palestinians and the Islamic block in the UN in an attempt to replicate the boycott strategy used against South African apartheid.

In their view, the product labeling is just the beginning.

In October 2012, 22 major NGOs in this network presented the European Union with a document tendentiously titled “Trading Away Peace: How Europe Helps Sustain Illegal Israeli Settlements.” Although called “nongovernmental,” most of these groups receive European government funds. Many are church-related, with long records of using their substantial financial clout to promote anti-Israel positions, including theological bias against any form of Jewish sovereign equality. These activist church-related groups include Diakonia (Sweden), Christian Aid (UK and Ireland), Cordaid and ICCO (Holland), the Church of Scotland and others from almost every Western European country.

The report, like most NGO publications, largely erases the history of Palestinian rejectionism with its decades of war and terror against Israelis, and presents the Palestinians as helpless victims. On this basis, their recommendations begin with “correct consumer labeling of all settlement products,” followed by a call to “ban imports of settlement products” and later, actions to “prevent financial transactions to settlements and related activities” – in other words, a boycott of Israeli banks and other core institutions.

In 2014, another major NGO, the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), joined the labeling campaign. Their Middle East activist experts include Daniel Levy (a member of J Street’s Advisory Council) and Hugh Lovatt, a chronic demonizer of Israel who blamed the kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers in June 2014 on “Israel’s policy of occupation.” Like the other NGOs, ECFR also has close contacts with officials from the EU and individual countries, which also fund its activities and pay salaries.

The close links between the anti-Israel NGO network and Euro-



Demonstrators crammed into boxes at London’s Parliament Square last year, purporting to represent living conditions in Gaza, during an event organized by Oxfam

pean officials dealing with the Middle East extends to the European Parliament. For example, immediately after the guidelines became public, Richard Howitt, a UK Labor politician and MEP, boasted that this was “a victory for political pressure on the European Union to begin to make a real difference in the Middle East Peace Process.” With MEP Alexandra Thein (Germany) and other European politicians, Howitt is a trustee of the Council for European Palestinian Relations, an NGO closely linked to Hamas.

Inside the EU, the policy process leading to the guidelines, including the funding provided for NGOs, is murky and difficult to trace in violation of basic democratic principles of transparency. However, the available evidence points to a leading role for bureaucrats who spent time in the EU office in Jerusalem, which serves as the de facto embassy to the Palestinian Authority.

These diplomats in the EU External Action Service (foreign ministry in Euro-speak) promote a biased Palestinian narrative and have very close relations with leaders of the NGOs that the EU funds. In Geneva, where the UN Human Rights Council holds its sessions, European diplomats work closely with officials from the leading anti-Israel NGOs that they fund.

Taken together, this is a formidable network of NGO officials and European diplomats committed to going from symbolic product labeling to major economic warfare. To counter this threat, Israel will need a coherent counter-strategy for NGO warfare, including guidelines to regulate unparalleled European government funding. ■

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