



I Ben-Maimon Blvd.
Jerusalem, Israel 92262
Phone: +972-2-566-1020
Fax: +972-77-511-7030
mail@ngo-monitor.org
www.ngo-monitor.org

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NGO Monitor Welcomes HRW's Opposition to Antisemitic NGO Forum at Durban 2

Human Rights Watch (HRW), the powerful New York based NGO, has undergone some important policy changes since playing an active role in the catastrophic NGO Forum at the UN's 2001 Durban Conference on Racism. [On November 13 2008, HRW's Geneva Director Juliette de Rivero wrote to the Libyan chair of the Preparatory Committee for the Durban Review Conference](#), strongly opposing the convening of another such NGO Forum in the review conference scheduled for April 2009. HRW criticized the "group of NGOs have taken steps to promote the organization of an NGO Forum" (including the Libyan linked Nord Sud XXI group and Charles Graves from [Interfaith International](#)), de Rivero wrote "that while Human Rights Watch remains faithfully involved in the Durban Review Conference, it does not support the proposal made by this or any other group to have an NGO Forum."

This principled position includes HRW's strongest denunciation of the hatred and demonization that characterized the [2001 Durban NGO Forum](#), and which led to the ongoing boycott campaigns and other forms of racism directed at Israel, and the wider degradation of human rights. In this way, HRW followed the lead of many other NGOs, led by ICARE, [Human Rights First](#), and others in seeking to reverse the damage done in 2001. De Rivero called on all participants to "avoid a repeat of ...the offensive behavior in the NGO Forum at the Durban Conference, and cited the High Commissioner's admission regarding "the virulent anti-Semitic behavior of a few [sic] non-governmental organizations ...". In fact, the anti-Semitic behavior in 2001 was part of the general atmosphere at the NGO Forum, and was not restricted to a "few" fringe groups. [HRW's delegation, led by Reed Brody, participated in this behavior](#) and failed to speak out until after the damage had become clear, (as documented by NGO Monitor). [Ken Roth, the long-time head of HRW, added to this demonization through terms such as "racism" in singling out Israel for attack](#), and afterwards, by participating in boycott activities. Other HRW officials, such as [Joe Stork and Sarah Leah Whitson](#) have contributed steadily to this process.

Given this background, HRW's statement opposing a repetition in 2009 represents an important admission of moral failure by HRW, and the call for other NGOs to make "a commitment to avoiding expressions of hatred against any group" reinforces this message. At the same time, HRW's call for increased involvement of NGOs in the governmental sessions of the 2009 review conference requires an additional commitment that HRW has resisted. Since a number of the NGOs that seek to speak and influence these proceedings continue to demonize and single-out Israel, HRW and other groups must demonstrate the willingness to actively oppose these NGO abuses, not only at the Review Conference, but also in all other frameworks in which human rights rhetoric and false claims are exploited to promote anti-Israel discrimination. HRW recently received (and proudly advertised) a human rights prize from the United Nations – which, given the UN's ongoing attack against the moral foundations of universal human rights, is hardly a sign of leadership and courage.

Prof. Gerald M. Steinberg
Executive Director, NGO Monitor