

Human Rights Watch declares Israel has crossed apartheid threshold

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Human Rights Watch (HRW) has published a report declaring that Israel, in implementing a policy of ethnic supremacy favouring Israeli Jews over 7 million Palestinians in Israel and the occupied territories, has “crossed the threshold” into apartheid.

The New York-based human right organisation points out that international law, embodied in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), defines apartheid—whereby one racial or ethnic group dominates another through intentional, systematic, and inhumane acts of oppression with the intention of maintaining that regime—as a crime against humanity.

In 2000, Israel signed the Rome Statute, and supported the ICC’s establishment, saying, “As one of the originators of the concept of an International Criminal Court, Israel, through its prominent lawyers and statesmen, has, since the early 1950s, actively participated in all stages of the formation of such a court. Its representatives, carrying in both heart and mind collective, and sometimes personal, memories of the Holocaust—the greatest and most heinous crime to have been committed in the history of mankind—enthusiastically, with a sense of acute sincerity and seriousness, contributed to all stages of the preparation of the Statute.”

Defying these fine words, Israel’s government, like its chief backer the US, and along with Russia and China, refused to ratify the treaty.

Kenneth Roth, HRW’s executive director said, “While much of the world treats Israel’s half-century occupation as a temporary situation that a decades-long ‘peace process’ will soon cure, the oppression of Palestinians there has reached a threshold and a permanence that meets the definitions of the crimes of apartheid and persecution.”

He added, “Those who strive for Israeli-Palestinian peace, whether a one or two-state solution or a

confederation, should in the meantime recognise this reality for what it is and bring to bear the sorts of human rights tools needed to end it.”

HRW’s 213-page report draws on years of human rights documentation, case studies and a review of government planning documents, statements by officials and other sources. It documents a catalogue of Israeli abuses committed against the Palestinians that indicate its intention of preserving its domination, including:

- * Sweeping restrictions on Palestinians’ movement in the occupied territories. While most Palestinians in the occupied West Bank live in areas under the nominal control of the Palestinian Authority, they are surrounded by Israeli checkpoints and subject to Israeli military intrusion at any time, with most of the West Bank (60 percent by area) is under Israel’s full military control.

- * Demolition of homes and “near-categorical denial” of building permits.

- * Military occupation.

- * Confiscation of one third of the land in the West Bank.

- * Rejection of residency rights for hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

- * Suspension of basic civil rights to millions of Palestinians.

- * Unrelenting settlement expansion policy.

- * Israel’s 2018 Jewish State law that defined Israel as the “nation-state of Jewish people.”

Ignoring past experience of such entreaties, HRW made futile appeals to Israel’s arms suppliers to make arms sales and military assistance conditional upon Israel’s initiatives to reform the system, to the ICC to prosecute Israelis suspected of involvement in the policy, and to foreign countries to sanction individual Israeli officials who are responsible for it.

Just weeks ago, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that his government would not cooperate with

the ICC's investigation into potential war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel during its 2014 assault on Gaza, denouncing the charges as "anti-Semitic." Both the US and UK governments issued public statements backing Israel and attacking the ICC.

The HRW report follows last January's report by Israel's human rights group B'Tselem that Israel is an "apartheid regime" that enforces Jewish supremacy over the Palestinians in all the land it controls, to the extent that they have far fewer rights than Jews living in the entire area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

This echoes statements Palestinians have made since the 1967 Arab Israeli war in which Israel seized the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem and Syria's Golan Heights, subsequently occupying them and annexing East Jerusalem, in defiance of international law. It comes 20 years after a United Nations draft resolution described Israeli repression against the Palestinians on the West Bank as a "new kind of apartheid, a crime against humanity," prompting a joint US-Israeli walkout from the conference on racism in Durban, South Africa, and 15 years after the publication of former US President Jimmy Carter's 2006 book *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*.

It indicates the degree to which public sentiment both within and outside Israel now recognizes Israel's policies as apartheid.

The Palestinians have welcomed the report, isolated as they are in the face of the US's support for Israel, and without any practical support from the Arab states, some of whom have formalized their relations with Israel after decades of backroom talks and deals. The European powers—while more eager than the US to find some means of resolving the long running conflict—refuse to do anything that alienates Israel. The European Union still views close relations with Israel, the Middle East's most important military state, as a means of offsetting Washington's domination of the region.

Predictably, the report met a hostile response from Israel, which likes to call itself "the only democracy in the Middle East." The foreign ministry dismissed it as "propaganda," saying, "Human Rights Watch is known to have a long-standing anti-Israel agenda, actively seeking for years to promote boycotts against Israel. Their decision not to share this report for review or comment with any Israeli authority is clear indication that it is a propaganda pamphlet, which lacks all credibility."

Gilad Erdan, Israel's ambassador to the United States, said the report bordered on anti-Semitism. He said,

"When the authors of the report cynically and falsely use the term apartheid, they nullify the legal and social status of millions of Israeli citizens, including Arab citizens, who are an integral part of the state of Israel."

Naturally, he deliberately ignored the provisions of the Jewish State Law that confer second-class status on Israel's two million Arab citizens as well as the 60 or so laws that actively discriminate against them in housing, education, healthcare, and other areas.

HRW's definition of Israel as a "regime of Jewish supremacy" that has become an apartheid state is a damning refutation of the Zionist-led campaign to use the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's (IHRA) definition of anti-Semitism to criminalise opposition to its treatment of the Palestinians.

The IHRA's definition is the spearhead of an anti-democratic campaign by the authorities in the US and UK, in conjunction with Israel to clamp down on free speech on university campuses. It is the weapon used by the Blairite right-wing in the Labour Party to witch-hunt the left around former leader Jeremy Corbyn. The broader aim is to stifle opposition to war that is the inevitable outcome of Israel's escalating provocations against Iran, mounted to deflect attention outwards from rising poverty and Netanyahu's manifestly corrupt relations with the media bosses.

In the final analysis, the deepening political, economic, social and healthcare crisis of the Zionist State has made it ever more reliant on war crimes and crimes against humanity to defend its interests against threats both at home and abroad.



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