The UN’s Sordid Embrace of Antisemitism

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The following is a speech delivered by Anne Bayefsky, Director of the Touro Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust and the President of Human Rights Voices, at the Special Forum on “Evolving Hatred: Antisemitism & BDS Today” convened by the Permanent Mission of Israel to the United Nations, UN, May 30, 2018.

The United Nations is an institution built on the ashes of the Jewish people and the devastation wreaked by antisemitism upon all civilization.

And yet, the UN has never adopted a resolution or commissioned a report singularly devoted to exposing, denouncing, and eradicating antisemitism wherever it occurs. Just this month, the Security Council was asked and refused to issue a “firm and unequivocal rejection of antisemitism and Holocaust denial.”

Why not? The answer is painfully clear: antisemitism itself. Right here in the United Nations.

Antisemitism at the UN does more than stymie opportunities for prevention. It creates occasions for promotion. The marketing strategy has three identifiable steps.

Step one: Deny. As a matter of routine, antisemites say they aren’t antisemites.

Except they are.

Two weeks ago — in this very room — a two-day forum on the “Question of Palestine” was convened. Under UN auspices. With UN-invited speakers and UN-accredited participants.

Speakers deprecated “the idea of a chosen people” and railed against a “Jewish lobby.” The Palestinian UN representative claimed Palestinian land was “exactly like” German-occupied France and Poland.

On May 18, 2018 at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, UN-accredited delegates (both states and NGOs) said: “The atrocities seen during the Second World War [are] happening again” and Palestinians are being “exterminated with a view to totally destroy the identity of a people.”

Right down the hall from here a “Palestine” exhibit has been deliberately relocated next to the Holocaust exhibit. Tour guides don’t stop at one without stopping at the other.

Belittling Jewish religious beliefs, invoking Jewish conspiracy theories, and analogizing Israelis to Nazis isn’t subtle. It’s antisemitism.

At the May forum successive speakers also denounced any Jewish state. Broadcast by the UN, for instance: the “racist policies … of Israel … draw from the Jewish character of the State of Israel.” A “Jewish democracy” is “an oxymoron.” And the Palestinian UN representative said, “President Truman, when they put a piece of paper for him, for the recognition of the Jewish State of Israel, he scratched the Jewish and he left it only as the State of Israel. This is only just to set the record straight.”

Straight historical revisionism, that is. Actually, Truman crossed out the typewritten “Jewish state” and added with his own hand “State of Israel” solely in response to learning the country’s new name and ensuring the US was first to recognize Israel 11 minutes after its proclamation.

It isn’t complicated. Self-determination for everyone but the Jewish people is antisemitism.

Step two: Obfuscate. Religious bigots claim that the conflict with Israel is not about religious bigotry.

Except it is.

They now say it’s about the 1967 borders and post-1967 settlements.

But a mere two weeks ago, right here, a UN-invited guest said Israel was “the only country in modern memory that uprooted its refugees, then … massacred them and humiliated them for seven decades.” Referring to Israel’s birth in 1948, the Palestinian UN representative declared, “We are very, very eager in order to put an end to … the misery of our people after 70 years of occupation.”

Challenging Israel’s existence for 70 years is antisemitism.

Step three: Attack. Charge Jews with participating in a cover-up and forbidding any criticism of Israel.

Except they don’t.

Furthermore, UN meetings in New York and Geneva in the past two weeks, which are not atypical, have resounded with accusations that the “Israeli killing machine” has been engaged in “ethnic cleansing,” “a culture of hate,” “atrocities,” “egregious cruelty,” “genocide,” “crimes against humanity,” “savagery,” “brutality,” and “a moral depravity of the most evil kind.” For starters.

No other country in the UN is subject to this kind of onslaught. This isn’t criticism. It’s a feeding frenzy. It’s antisemitism.

Let’s not forget that at the United Nations we’ve been down this path before.

Remember the alleged “massacre” of 500 people in the suicide-bomber capital of Jenin in 2002? Three months later, the UN admitted there had been no massacre and a total of about 20 Palestinian civilians had died, fewer than the number of Israeli casualties.

Remember the UN Goldstone report of 2009? It accused Israel of deliberately targeting civilians — until Goldstone himself recanted the libel.

And now comes the latest UN mission launched amid accusations of another Israeli massacre of civilians in Gaza. This one debunked by Hamas and Islamic Jihad themselves, who couldn’t resist boasting that 85% of casualties were their own.

There is a pattern here. It’s called antisemitism. Or as the Queen of Hearts would describe UN inquisitions, “Sentence first. Verdict afterwards.”

Beyond the UN hyperbole, straight statistics tell the same story:

* The UN Human Rights Council reserves one permanent agenda item for condemning Israel. All other 192 UN states are considered together.
* The Council has adopted more resolutions condemning Israel than any other country on earth and nothing on almost 90% of the world’s states.
* There have been ten emergency special sessions of the General Assembly. Five are on Israel alone, including the tenth, now reconvened 17 times. 500,000 dead and seven million displaced in Syria have never resulted in a single emergency special session.
* In 2017 the General Assembly adopted 21 resolutions condemning Israel and a single resolution each on a handful of other countries.
* The UN Commission on the Status of Women annually condemns only one country on the planet for violating women’s rights — Israel for violating the rights of Palestinian women.

This record of egregious discrimination is the antithesis of the UN Charter’s promise of equality for all nations large and small. It’s antisemitism.

A Palestinian illustrator recently depicted an Israeli soldier force-feeding poison to a Palestinian baby after a false accusation that Israel had killed a baby girl who in fact died of a congenital heart defect. Controversy surrounded a photograph of Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas enjoying the publication. But at the UN, this was old news. Last November that same illustrator was feted here at a UN event organized by a UN committee. He was introduced by the Palestinian UN representative as “the pride of a nation” for his “contribution to humankind.” At the time, his illustrations or “contributions” included a Jewish Star of David twisted to mimic Nazi barbed wire imprisoning Palestinians.

In short, today’s UN acts as a force multiplier for antisemitism, glorifying its proponents and providing a global platform for its advocates. To which there is no response from inside the United Nations other than — for shame.