Amnesty is charging Israeli apartheid to erase Jewish state - Israel says

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<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-695055>

Amnesty International’s report [labeling](https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-689419) Israel an apartheid state seeks to criminalize the existence of the Jewish state as the national homeland for the Jewish people, the Foreign Ministry stated on Monday.

“The report denies Israel’s right to exist of the nation-state of the Jewish people,” the Foreign Ministry said as it called on the British-based group to rescind its 211-page report.

Amnesty’s “extreme language and distortion of the historical context were intended to demonize Israel and pour fuel into the engines of antisemitism,” the ministry said.

It obtained a copy of the report due out at 11 a.m. on Tuesday titled “Israel’s Apartheid against Palestinians: Cruel System of Domination and Crime against Humanity.”

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid issued a video message in English, in which he charged, “If Israel wasn’t a Jewish state, no one would dare make such a claim against it.”

Amnesty doesn’t call Syria where the regime has murdered half a million of its own citizens an apartheid state or Iran or other murderous regimes around the world, only Israel,” Lapid said.

“This country might not be perfect but we are a democracy committed to international law, open to criticism with a free press and a strong and independent judicial system.”

A number of Jewish organizations and Israeli right-wing groups obtained a copy of the report in advance, with NGO Monitor even posting a page of it on Twitter.

Amnesty maintained its embargo on the report, as well as its comments to the media despite the backlash against it by Israel and international Jewish groups.

It did eventually issue a partial response, in which it held onto its apartheid charge.

“The report details how the State of Israel has established a system of institutional discrimination, oppression and domination against the Palestinian people” which is a breach of International law, Amnesty wrote in the report.

“Any suggestions that this is an attempt to destabilize Israel, or is antisemitic, are false and baseless, and represent a clear attempt to divert attention from the human rights abuses and violations suffered by the Palestinian people,” the report continued.

“As an anti-racist organization, Amnesty stands against antisemitism, which is antithetical to human rights. We oppose discrimination, racism and hate crime in all forms, including against Jewish people or people perceived as Jewish.”

Amnesty has consistently insisted, “We recognize the Jewish people’s right to self-determination... We condemn and seek justice for attacks on Israeli civilians, and... our criticism is targeted at the Israeli authorities and not the Jewish people or the Israeli people.”

Critics of the report, including the Foreign Ministry, said linking apartheid with the Jewish nature of the State of Israel as inherently antisemitic.

“The purpose” of the report is “is to characterize the right of Jews to sovereign equality in their historic homeland as a violation of the [international] legal order,” NGO Monitor stated.

“The overarching political objective is to erase and subsume the nation-state of the Jewish people into a single state of Palestine,” it added.

It pointed the widely accepted definition of antisemitism by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, which states: “Denying the Jewish people their right to self-determination, e.g., by claiming that the existence of a State of Israel is a racist endeavor.”

Foreign Ministry spokesman Lior Haiat, speaking at an event hosted by Media Central on Monday afternoon, said Amnesty had not provided his office with a copy of the report.

The apartheid charge seeks to transform Israel’s conflict with the Palestinians into a racist one, something that is ahistorical to the dispute between the two peoples, he said.

NGO Monitor’s legal advisor Ann Herzberg, who spoke at the same event, said the apartheid charge is powerful.

“It exploits antisemitic tropes to transform the conflict from one of disputed land... to one of Jewish racism.

“Today racism is one of the worst accusations that one can be charged with, and South African apartheid is one of the worst human rights crimes of the 20th century,” she said.

The charge invokes a plan of action, “boycott, international isolation and elimination” of the Jewish state, Herzberg said. “Those levying that claim understand that background quite clearly," she said.

Herzberg noted that UN Resolution 181, under which the State of Israel was created also enshrined it as a Jewish state. She accused Amnesty of trying to relitigate the very nature of the state.

Haiat added that the report is not criticizing the state, but rather saying, “It is an illegal state” and has “no right to exist.”

Amnesty International is the fourth left-wing NGO to accuse Israel of the crime of apartheid in the last two years. However, it is not the sole county against which it has issued such a charge. Amnesty has also accused Myanmar of apartheid for its treatment of the Rohingya.

It follows similar accusations by Human Rights Watch and the Israeli group B’Tselem. Yesh Din limited its apartheid charges to the West Bank, whereas the others spoke of Israeli actions of apartheid both within its sovereign territory and areas of its military rule.

According to a number of NGOs who saw the report, the document examines allegations of apartheid against Israel since its inception in 1948 and throughout its subsequent history.

The Anti-Defamation League stated that the report’s allegations that “Israel’s crimes go back to the sin of its creation in 1948, serve to present the Jewish and democratic state as singularly illegitimate at its foundational roots.”

The report, NGOs said, criminalizes Israel as an ethnic Jewish democracy without mentioning or similarly criminalizing Palestinian plans for its own ethnic nationalist democracy.

Specifically, the report accuses Israel of apartheid both for not withdrawing to the pre-1967 line and for not accepting a Palestinian “right of return” to sovereign Israel for Palestinian refugees.

B’nai B’rith International said, “The number of people now deemed [Palestinian] refugees would immediately overwhelm Israel and quickly end its existence as a Jewish state.”.

The ADL said the report’s delegitimization of “the Jewish right to self-determination in its historic homeland, but also undermines the vision of a mutually negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that will provide security, dignity and self-determination to both peoples.”

The NGOs also took exception to the lack of context in the report, which presented Israel’s demographic concerns with respect to the Palestinians, but did not deemphasize its security concerns.

Similarly, the report failed to provide adequate historical context about the growth of the Jewish population in Israel with respect to details of Jewish refugees from Arab lands or stateless Holocaust survivors.

Haiat said the report ignores “the history in which Israeli right after the War of Independence was the survivor of intent of ethnic cleansing. Arab states and Arab armies tried to ethnically cleanse all the Jews from the Land of Israel.”

The report also spoke of Israeli discriminatory practices against its Arab citizens without also mentioning their significant contribution to the Jewish state, the NGOs said, with the ADL noting that Arabic is one of the official languages of the State of Israel.

The Conference of Presidents said the report “disregards the fact that Israel’s robust democracy grants its Arab citizens full rights and equality, includes an Arab Muslim nationalist party in Israel’s governing coalition, as well as a history of senior Israeli Arab governmental officials, including Supreme Court justices, government ministers, high-level diplomats, military officers and members of Knesset.”

It noted that the initiative to label Israel as an apartheid state comes just as Arab countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan were making peace with it.

Amnesty’s release of its report comes in advance of anticipated action on the matter this year before the UN Human Rights Council, including in the first report this June of the permanent Commission of Inquiry against Israel.

“Make no mistake. Amnesty wants to use sanctions, boycotts [and] arrests of Israeli officials to attack Israel’s existence as a Jewish state. Much of the Arab world moves to peace with Israel; Amnesty wants a return to the Cold War, state boycotts and Soviet propaganda,” NGO Monitor stated.

“For [two-and-a-half] years, dozens of NGOs and their UN allies have campaigned using pseudo-reports to accuse Israel of “apartheid,” NGO Monitor tweeted. “A year after the [Human Rights Watch report], which is virtually identical, Amnesty jumps on the bandwagon to boost the [apartheid](https://www.jpost.com/international/article-689307) hate campaign.”

The ADL warned the report would “lead to intensified antisemitism” and that it “places Jews in danger around the world.”