Rewarding a UN antisemite

October 5, 2023

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Jewish News Syndicate

<https://www.jns.org/rewarding-a-un-antisemite/>

Every year, the American Branch of the International Law Association (ABILA) presents its “Outstanding Achievement Award” to a lawyer or jurist who, the organization believes, has made outstanding contributions to the field of international law.

This is a laudable endeavor, but it is puzzling that ABILA chose to give this year’s award to Navi Pillay, a U.N. official with a long-standing and deep-seated hostility towards and bias against Israel.

On paper, Pillay’s CV seems impeccable. She is a South African jurist, legal trailblazer and judge who served as a former U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights.

The reality is much uglier: Pillay has devoted her long-standing international platform—including as the current chair of the permanent U.N. Commission of Inquiry (CoI) on Israel—to the relentless vilification of the Jewish state and the whitewashing of Palestinian terror under the guise of human rights and international law.

The CoI was created in the wake of the 2021 conflict between Hamas and Israel. It is ostensibly tasked with investigating supposed “underlying root causes” of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but the [resolution](https://www.ohchr.org/en/hr-bodies/hrc/co-israel/index) establishing the commission did not even mention Hamas, a U.S.-designated terror organization sworn to Israel’s destruction that has fired almost 4,500 rockets at Israeli civilians.

Even before Pillay was appointed to the CoI, she had a [long history of bias against Israel](https://www.ilfngo.org/_files/ugd/3445b6_16b0eb66521a4a4491667df768a8a1f1.pdf), referring to the Jewish state as an “apartheid regime” and accusing it of “war crimes” and “crimes against humanity.”

Pillay is an ardent advocate of the racist Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, whose primary goal is the destruction of the Jewish state. She has [said](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nF61qfb5J-k) that she hopes the BDS campaign will “catch on, as did the anti-apartheid movement.”

As far back as 2009, when Pillay was serving as U.N. High Commissioner, she [applauded](https://www.ilfngo.org/_files/ugd/3445b6_16b0eb66521a4a4491667df768a8a1f1.pdf) Iran’s participation in a U.N. conference purportedly dedicated to combating racism that was headed by then-Iranian president, genocidal antisemite and Holocaust denier Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

In June 2020, just before her appointment to the CoI, Pillay signed “[The Global South Statement](https://mcusercontent.com/36542688e353931ee951122b3/files/f6b47740-527e-4747-bb30-b348b750dd2c/Global_South_Statement_FINAL.pdf),” which called for sanctions on Israel, including a military embargo and support for the International Criminal Court’s baseless probe into alleged “Israeli war crimes.”

This kind of bias is a direct and flagrant violation of the U.N.’s own [Rules and Guidelines on Commissions of Inquiry and Fact-Finding Missions](https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/CoI_Guidance_and_Practice.pdf), which states, “Members should, in all cases, have a proven record of independence and impartiality.”

In any democratic country, a judge exhibiting Pillay’s blatant lack of impartiality would never be appointed in the first place. But at the U.N., antisemites and Israel-haters are consistently promoted and rewarded.

A 28-nation coalition led by the United States has already condemned Pillay and the CoI, [stating](https://geneva.usmission.gov/2023/06/20/joint-statement-on-the-coi-on-israel-hrc53/), “The nature of this CoI is further demonstration of long-standing, disproportionate attention given to Israel in the Council, and must stop.”

[Bipartisan legislation](https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/211/cosponsors?r=1&s=2) has been introduced in the U.S. Congress calling for the elimination of the CoI. It states, “The ongoing anti-Israel commission formed by the U.N’s discredited Human Rights Council directly obstructs peace in the Middle East and intentionally targets the only democracy in the region. … Our U.S. tax dollars have no place funding an anti-Israel commission.”

In July 2022, one of Pillay’s fellow CoI commissioners, Miloon Kothari, made an outrageous antisemitic remark, claiming that “[the Jewish lobby](https://www.newsweek.com/new-low-antisemitism-un-opinion-1729815)” controls social media. He was roundly condemned, including by the U.N., but [Pillay](https://apnews.com/article/middle-east-israel-geneva-race-and-ethnicity-92d888b43d685e65d82952980a032e6f) leapt to his defense and then had the audacity to deflect the blame on to Israel.

In Oct. 2022, when pressed about the charges of antisemitism plaguing the CoI, Pillay dismissed them out of hand, calling such claims “a diversion.”

Yet in spite of all this, Pillay will be awarded ABILA’s top honor at their International Law Weekend gathering in New York later this month, which is being [sponsored](https://www.timesofisrael.com/leading-us-jewish-groups-decry-top-legal-award-for-anti-israel-un-official/) by a number of leading U.S. law firms.

According to ABILA, one of the primary considerations for determining the recipient of the “Outstanding Achievement Award” is their “sustained superior contributions to the field of international law.”

Pillay’s only “outstanding achievement” is her breathtaking hypocrisy and abuse of the very foundations of international law in order to relentlessly demonize the Jewish state and excuse Palestinian terror. No law firm or association should legitimize such blatant bigotry, antisemitism and hatred.