The UN should stop funding the Palestinian narrative

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For the past several decades, the United Nations General Assembly has dutifully approved the funding of the so-called specialized “Palestinian committees,” each of which advances only one side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The UN has an opportunity to cut off this funding supply by year-end, thereby righting a decades-long wrong and in turn, ending a long-standing charade.

Created in the aftermath of the infamous 1975 Zionism=Racism resolution, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) and the Division for Palestinian Rights (DPR) are powerful, enduring vestiges of a discredited policy that has seen the world body largely aligned against Israel, not only in New York, but at UN agencies such as the Human Rights Council in Geneva, and UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) in Paris.

The CEIRPP organizes conferences, photo exhibitions and other programs around the world aimed at undermining, discrediting and demonizing Israel. It does so with the active cooperation of the UN’s Department of Global Communications.

The DPR actually sits inside the UN Secretariat, giving the Palestinians a UN home no other people or sovereign state has. DPR sits alongside regional units such as the Asian, the African and Latin American, and the Caribbean groups of the UN system. The DPR works together with CEIRPP to organize an annual International Day of Solidarity for the Palestinian People, and maintains UN web-based information systems devoted to the Palestinian side of the conflict.

At the core of the work of these offices is the perpetuation of “the right of return” narrative that demands all Palestinians considered by the UN to be refugees have a right to “return” to pre-state Israel. Since 1949 the UN has, through the creation of UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency), aggressively advanced this position.

So why are millions of people classified as refugees? Because as “refugees” they maintain their claim to migrate to Israel in order to overwhelm the Jewish majority and thus end the existence of the State of Israel.

According to the UN, there are now 5.5 million such refugees, less than 1% of whom were actual refugees from the War of Independence in 1948. More than 99% are their descendants, now five generations on. The UN has endeavored to find solutions to nearly every other refugee crisis in the world over the years, largely by resettling people in the lands to which they fled.

Only in the case of the Palestinians has an infrastructure been established to perpetuate a crisis. Over these past seven decades UNRWA, through its schools and other services, and the UN system have held out the promise that all Palestinians will one day “return” to what is now the State of Israel.

In fact, 40% of these “refugees” already live on the West Bank and in Gaza among fellow Palestinians, yet they maintain a status of refugees, so they would be able to migrate to Israel under the “right of return.” Another 40% live in Jordan, where many acquired Jordanian citizenship. They, too, live among people with whom they share religion and language, but maintain their refugee status so as to qualify for a “right of return,” as do the remaining 20% who live in Syria, Lebanon and other Arab countries.

THE RECENTLY signed peace agreements between Israel and the United Arab Emirates and with Bahrain, and actions and public statements by other Arab states, suggest that the Palestinian program to end Israel’s existence is losing support among some Arabs. The world – and especially the region – have moved on. Other considerations, largely based on national interest, have taken precedence: the threat of Iranian hegemony, trade and investment and even tourism, are incentives to normalization.

The Palestinians have overplayed their hand, pressing for a zero-sum outcome to the conflict with Israel, and especially by its leaders missing opportunity after opportunity to conclude a peace with Israel in the 27 years since the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993.

The Palestinian reaction to the Abraham Accords has been a vehement reassertion of their position, including the “right of return,” made possible, in large part by the automatic reinforcement they receive at the UN

It is the UN, created to “maintain peace and security,” that encourages the Palestinians to hold out for their one state solution: A “Palestinian state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea,” a goal to be attained through a “right of return.”

The CEIRIPP and the DPR are the chief proponents of this campaign, but are aided by regional groups at the UN such as the Group of 77 (known for years as the “Non-Aligned”) and a raft of anti-Israel resolutions adopted by rote at the Human Rights Council and other UN agencies, including the World Heritage Committee, a sub-group of UNESCO.

The Palestinian claim of a “right of return” is simply an obstacle to peace; it has become the third rail of the conflict. No one dares touch it; no friends of the Palestinians – and there are several amongst the European countries – seem interested in persuading them that the idea is simply a non-starter. It is not going to happen. No Israeli government from anywhere on the political spectrum would sign its own national suicide warrant.

The vote count supporting funding of the Palestinian committees is dropping; the number of “no” votes to fund these committees is rising – slightly – with a large number of abstentions and those voting “absent.”

A new wind is blowing in the region. “Normalization” is in, and obstructionism is on its way out. Israel, the UAE, Bahrain and perhaps others to come are demonstrating that where there is good will to resolve more than seven decades of animosity, economic warfare and the absence of real human interaction, reconciliation can follow.

Spending millions of dollars on conferences that perpetuate the “right of return” mantra and the constant efforts to delegitimize Israel is both a waste of time and a sure prescription for the UN to become increasingly irrelevant when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian issue.

The responsible member states of the UN need to look out the window and see the dramatic, positive changes that are taking place across the region, despite attempts by Iran and its proxies and terrorist surrogates to perpetuate chaos and instability.

Depoliticizing “peacemaking” at the UN by eliminating the CEIRIPP and the DPR would send a clear message to the Palestinians and their friends that the free ride is over. That will tell us whether or not they are really interested in emulating their neighbors who have reached historic accords with Israel.

Until the UN ends its support of the “right of return,” we cannot expect meaningful progress toward a peaceful resolution of the conflict.