'My people's suffering under apartheid used to criminalize Israel' - South African activist

June 13, 2022

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The Jerusalem Post

<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-709295>

The suffering of blacks in South Africa under its apartheid regime [has become an antisemitic tool](https://www.jpost.com/jerusalem-report/article-698470) by which to delegitimize Israel, Christian pro-Israel activist and Johannesburg native Olga Meshoe Washington said on Monday.

“My people’s history and experience is being used as an antisemitic tool to politically, morally and with incredible pretzel-like twisting and legal gymnastics, [legally delegitimize Israel](https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/article-696857) with the hope to criminalize her.”

### **The damning COI report**

Washington was speaking in Geneva, Switzerland, as an event hosted by the [NGO UN Watch.](https://www.jpost.com/j-spot/hillel-neuer-warrior-for-israel-in-geneva-683377) The gathering was held in advance of a UN Human Rights Council[debate on the first presentation](https://www.jpost.com/breaking-news/article-708770) of what will be an annual report by the UN’s three-member “Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the occupied Palestinian territory, including east Jerusalem and Israel,” otherwise known as the COI on Israel.

The initial 18-page report explained that the COI on Israel blames Israel for the conflict with the Palestinians, and insists that Israel has no intention of ending its oppressive systematic “occupation.” The COI also spoke of its intention to investigate issues of discrimination against Arab-Israelis living within Israel’s sovereign borders. The COI is headed by former UN high commissioner for human rights [Navanethem (“Navi”) Pillay.](https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-709090" \t "_blank)

### **Why Israel is nervous about the report**

There was no mention in the COI about any plans to investigate Israel for the crime of apartheid, however, Israeli officials and critics of the report fear it is laying the groundwork for such a charge in the future.

Legal expert Ann Herzberg of NGO Monitor, who also addressed the UN Watch event, said that accusing Israel of apartheid “is on the UNHRC agenda. It is just building up its case for it.”

Author and former MK Einat Wilf linked the apartheid accusation with the 1948 War of Independence. She explained that just like Arab nations sought to annihilate the fledgling Jewish state during that war, modern enemies of Israel have used the apartheid label to claim that a Jewish state within any borders is illegitimate.

Washington told the audience that the situation in Israel was incomparable to that of South Africa, so much so that a new definite of apartheid had been created to allow for what was a decades-old “lie” first conceived by Soviet and Arab propaganda to be leveled against Israel.

THIS DISSOCIATION is troubling, said Washington, who is the executive director of the pro-Israel South African NGO DEISI (Defend, Embrace, Invest in, Support Israel) International.

“It trivializes the humiliation and injustices endured by black South Africans who lived through apartheid and now still, together with their descendants, bear the scars of its legacy,” she explained.

“It erases the very real, very livid experience of the brutality of apartheid, a reality that includes mothers who to this day do not know what happened to their children, and millions of black South Africans who had to flee their country and live in exile under fear of persecution purely because of the color of their skin,” Washington said.

How will this affect diplomatic relations?

“The weaponization of apartheid by the UN and now the COI makes a mockery” of the UN, goes against its objective of upholding human rights and creates a barrier for future Israeli-Palestinian peace, she said, adding that it also belies both Israel’s modern role on the African continent and the West’s history with it.

Forty-four of Africa’s 54 countries have full diplomatic relations with Israel that include cooperative agreements in education, defense, agriculture, hi-tech, health and finance, Washington said.

This reality, however, is not reflected by the African voting pattern at the UN, even though African countries have forged close ties with Western nations that “colonized and enslaved our people and slaughtered us like animals.”

“We have propped up the morally and legally corrupt notions that Israel is guilty of apartheid, colonization and genocide,” she said. “To what benefit? Africa is now the global eye of terrorism, and slavery is rampant in no less than five African countries, some of which have had a seat on the UNHRC.”

Arab-Israeli human rights activist [Yoseph Haddad,](https://www.jpost.com/arab-israeli-conflict/article-702879" \t "_blank) who is CEO of the NGO Together–Vouch for Each Other, told the audience he was “fed up” with the UN’s “obsession” against Israel because it prevented resources from going to those working to bridge the gap between Israelis and Jews.

“Let me clarify for this COI that I am an Arab Israeli with equal rights under the law in the State of Israel,” said Haddad, who served in the IDF’s Golani Brigade.

“This report, at its core, fundamentally misunderstood the conflict and misattributed every social ill – and I mean every social ill that impacts Palestinians – to Israel,” he explained.

“Nowhere in this report did they address the ‘underlying root cause’ of Palestinians refusing to recognize my country’s right to exist, or the fact that Palestinians have rejected multiple offers for peace, or the issues of incitement within Palestinian culture, or the Palestinian leadership’s corruption. No, they just blamed Israel.”

Haddad said the UNHRC was funding the COI instead of tackling issues of China’s forced imprisonment of the Uighur Muslims, the Taliban’s abuse of women in Afghanistan and Iran’s sponsorship of global terrorism.

The UN has become part of the problem, he explained. Addressing his comments to the UN, he said, peace “will be made by Arabs and Jews on the ground, not by your reports produced to justify your outrageous inflated budgets and lack of results to show for it.”