**UN appointment of Canadian professor creates controversy**

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By: Patrick Martin & Michelle Zilio

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The appointment of a Canadian professor to a delicate advisory position at the United Nations Human Rights Council has set off a storm of controversy on three continents.

Stanley Michael Lynk, a professor in the faculty of law at Western University in London, Ont., was named on March 24 as "Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967" – a contentious position if ever there was one, especially as the past holders of this office have generally interpreted their mandate as looking largely at alleged human-rights violations by the occupying power: Israel.

The Lynk appointment was met immediately with a barrage, led by the criticism of the Geneva-based organization UN Watch. Its executive director, Hillel Neuer, a Canadian, described Prof. Lynk as "an ardent anti-Israeli activist for at least three decades [who] plays a leadership role in groups that advocate against Israel, and participates in political campaigns that use demonizing language against Israelis."

Among other things, Mr. Neuer alleged that Mr. Lynk "cited Nazi war crimes in his call for 'legal strategies' to prosecute Israelis," that he supports a protest movement known as "Israel Apartheid Week" at Western, and that he "blamed the West for provoking the attacks" on 9/11.

"Mr. Lynk," he concluded, "fails the minimal impartiality requirements" of a UNHRC rapporteur.

In Canada, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) followed suit.

"We strongly denounce the appointment of Michael Lynk to this role," Shimon Fogel, the centre's CEO, wrote in a statement. "Mr. Lynk has a long record of involvement with anti-Israel initiatives and has repeatedly made public statements that demonstrate hostility towards Israel."

Before Mr. Lynk had a chance to defend himself, Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion tweeted: "We call on @UNHRC to review this appointment & ensure Special Rapporteur has the track record that can advance peace in the region."

Joseph Pickerill, director of communications in the Foreign Minister's office, later explained: "What is absolutely critical is that the mandate holder upholds the highest standards of probity, impartiality, equity and good faith. These are the standards set by the office and of these, the most critical trait is impartiality. On this score, we are concerned by some reports and past statements, which we reviewed independently."

Mr. Lynk issued a statement Saturday explaining that many of the contentious statements were taken out of context or were not his words at all.

The Nazi reference was made at a conference on the history of the Geneva Conventions. It was one of several historical examples in which various powers carried out illegal settlement of occupied territory, thus giving rise to the Conventions' chapters on occupied territories.

Regarding 9/11, the full quote on what Mr. Lynk said on Sept. 14, 2001, was: "The tragedy that hit the United States on Tuesday was immense and unspeakable. Terrorism anywhere that targets innocent civilians is impermissible and vile. Yet, if we are going to be tough on terrorism, we also have to be tough on the causes of terrorism. Growing global inequalities, disregard by Western nations for the international rule of law, and inequitable regional alliances are serious problems that breed these kinds of acts."

Craig Scott, a York University law professor and former NDP MP, wrote Mr. Dion to vouch for the man he had known for many years. Mr. Lynk "is a person of recognized integrity," he wrote. "His scholarship includes international law on the Israel/Palestine conflict of a high standard."

He pointed to Lynk contributions in authoritative international books and journals that were not mentioned by his critics and to a 2014 op-ed in the Toronto Star in which he called "for war-crimes accountability on both sides" in Israel's 2014 war against Hamas in Gaza.

"This is a far cry from the impression the CIJA press release left when it condemned Prof. Lynk for 'calling for Israel to be prosecuted for war crimes,' " Mr. Scott said.

On Wednesday, 40 Western faculty members petitioned Mr. Dion to withdraw his call for a review of Prof. Lynk's UN appointment.

"We are very concerned that you, in your role as Canada's foreign affairs minister, have called into question Professor Lynk's track record with respect to advancing peace in the region," the statement said.

Mr. Lynk's writings on Middle East affairs "present a balanced, principled, and responsible perspective, grounded in the scholarship of human rights and international law."

"We are proud that he has been granted this appointment, and we respectfully urge you to withdraw your call for a review of Professor Lynk's appointment."

Mr. Fogel, CEO of CIJA, acknowledged the professor's reputation as a legal scholar. "For us, it's not about Michael Lynk," he said. "The real question here is whether he's an appropriate selection for the particular position in question."The answer, hesaid is no. Michael Lynk "is not objective. He has chosen sides. He's entirely free to do that," but that disqualifies him from being an impartial rapporteur.

In an exclusive interview with The Globe and Mail, Mr. Lynk acknowledged he had chosen sides: "My allegiance," he said, "is to international law, to human-rights law."

"As Franklin Roosevelt once said: 'I'm open-minded but not empty-minded.'"

Mr. Lynk, a former labour lawyer before joining Western in 1999, complained that in these recent attacks he has been found guilty "by association."

Merely speaking at a conference does not mean he supports everything that others say there.

"I didn't use the word apartheid," Mr. Lynk insisted. "Someone else did."

"I don't think I've ever used that word in the Israeli-Palestinian context."

He admitted using the term Nazi at an academic conference but only as an historical footnote. "I would never use an analogy like that [when it comes to Israel]" he said. "It is odious."

He said he thinks that the anger that followed his appointment "is less about me … than about the office itself."

"I'm just collateral damage."

He understands why Israel is upset about the appointment. "Any country that has a human-rights magnifying glass hovering over it would be uncomfortable," he said.

Mr. Lynk acknowledged that in the 22 years of there being a UNHRC special rapporteur none had taken the mandate much beyond monitoring Israeli behaviour. Should that mandate be expanded to include possible human-rights abuses by Palestinian authorities in the West Bank and Gaza? "It's a fair question," he said. "I'm open to looking at expanding the job."

Mr. Lynk takes his position on May 1.