“Zionism is Racism” Ideology Lives on at the United Nations

November 13, 2015

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Canada Free Press

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At a special event held at United Nations headquarters in New York on November 11th entitled “The battle for Zionism at the United Nations,” the UN commemorated the 40th anniversary of the speech by Israel’s late president and UN ambassador, Chaim Herzog, against the infamous General Assembly Resolution 3379 that equated Zionism to racism. Mr. Herzog concluded his stirring speech by ripping up the resolution at the General Assembly podium and declaring: “For us, the Jewish people, this resolution based on hatred, falsehood and arrogance, is devoid of any moral or legal value.”

The speakers at the anniversary event included UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, the sons of Chaim Herzog—Opposition Leader Isaac Herzog and Brigadier General (Res.) Mike Herzog, Israel’s Ambassador to the UN, Danny Danon, and US Ambassador to the UN, Samantha Power. Each speaker lauded Chaim Herzog for his courage in standing up for truth against the hatred, bigotry and ignorance embodied in the resolution. They expressed satisfaction that the resolution was repealed in 1991, but recognized that hatred, bigotry and ignorance remain with us today in even more dangerous forms.

Sadly, while the formal resolution equating Zionism to racism is gone, the underlying anti-Semitic sentiments that animated the resolution are very much alive at the United Nations today.   
As Isaac Herzog said: “Rather than understanding that Israel is here forever, and part of the familyof nations, Israel is the only nation that is challenged day in and day out in this building for its mere existence.” Little has really changed in the forty years since his father stood up at the General Assembly and ripped up the “Zionism is Racism” resolution.

Zionism is the legitimate expression of self-determination for the Jewish people. It is based on a shared history, religion, culture and set of beliefs, which Jews’ bitter experience living in other countries has taught them are best protected within a homeland of their own. Israel today is multiethnic and multiracial – the precise opposite of the defamatory labels that anti-Semites continue to try to attach to it.

Moreover, self-determination for the Jewish people does not negate self-determination for Palestinians truly interested in building their own state, peacefully co-existing side by side with the Jewish State of Israel.

However, the Palestinian leadership rejects any true two-state solution that would respect the right of each of the two states to function with its own chosen identity based on the self-determination of its own people. In 1947, 2000 and 2008, Palestinians were offered substantial land within which to build their own state. The Palestinian leaders rejected the offers because they would have left a Jewish state intact. In 2005, Israel unilaterally withdrew from Gaza, only to see it used by Hamas and other jihadists to launch terror attacks against Jewish civilians living inside of Israel. The Palestinians’ mantra has always been, and remains today, that Jews cannot have any land of their own in the region – not even a sliver.  And the United Nations has enabled this Palestinian rejectionism.

### A whole industry has been built up inside the UN with the avowed aim of delegitimizing Israel in the service of Palestinian claims of inalienable rights

Secretary of State John Kerry said in his remarks commemorating Chaim Herzog’s speech denouncing the “Zionism Is Racism” resolution: “We are here to resolve that in our hearts and in our actions we will do all in our power to prevent the hijacking of this great forum for malicious intent…”

Kerry is whistling past the graveyard. Since that resolution was passed, a whole industry has been built up inside the UN with the avowed aim of delegitimizing Israel in the service of Palestinian claims of “inalienable rights.” Multiple organizations within the UN system are devoted to the Palestinian cause, none of which appear to be sincerely working for a viable two-state solution. The UN Human Rights Council should be more aptly named the Vilification of Israel Council. Worst of all is the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, UNRWA, which serves approximately 5 million Palestinian so-called “refugees.”

More than sixty-five years after UNRWA’s establishment as a temporary relief agency for those who originally left their homes when Israel became an independent state, UNRWA has become a permanent UN fixture. UNRWA deals specifically with Palestine refugees in its five areas of operation in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, West Bank and the Gaza Strip. It is far larger than any other United Nations sponsored humanitarian relief agency. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) is charged with responsibility for all other refugees.

The number of refugees for which the United Nations High Commission for Refugees is responsible is about four times as large as UNRWA. Yet the Palestinian refugee agency has operated with a staff approximately four times as large as the refugee agency responsible for the rest of the world. According to a March 2015 report by the Heritage Foundation, UNHCR has one staff member for every 5,500 refugees and other persons of concern. UNRWA has one staff person for every 182 people registered by UNRWA.

Recognizing that it would wither away as a separate refugee agency devoted only to Palestinians as the number of original refugees remaining alive continued to decline, UNRWA first expanded the definition of Palestinian “refugees” to include the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of those whom had actually left the land encompassing pre-1967 Israel. The definition was later further expanded to encompass all future generations of descendants. This handing down of refugee status from generation to generation is unique for Palestinians. Descendants of refugees in the rest of the world are not routinely counted as refugees themselves.

UNRWA also redefined itself from its original temporary relief and resettlement functions to emphasizing political advocacy for Palestinian “rights,” including the so-called “right of return.”

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UNRWA perpetuates the narrative that the millions of Palestinians labeled as “refugees” have an inherent right to return to the areas encompassed by pre-1967 Israel. Until they can fully exercise their so-called “right of return,” UNRWA intends to continue their status as refugees even after the Palestinians have the independent state they are seeking. Only for generations of so-called Palestinian “refugees” is return to the place of origin of the actual original refugees considered an inalienable right which they preserve forever. For all other refugees, the principal right protected is to seek asylum in the destination country and to be granted asylum status if they qualify.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said at the event commemorating Chaim Herzog’s speech denouncing the “Zionism Is Racism” resolution that the “reputation of the United Nations was badly damaged by the adoption of resolution 3379, in and beyond Israel and the wider Jewish community.” He noted how Mr. Herzog had spoken up “forcefully in defense of Zionism, the Jewish national movement.”

Yet on the same day he made his remarks in recognition of the moral strength of Mr. Herzog’s “defense of Zionism, the Jewish national movement,” Ban Ki-moon nominated an individual to serve as the new United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, who showed hostility to Israel in his previous position as Commissioner-General of UNRWA.  Filippo Grandi, Ban Ki-moon’s nominee, has advocated policies that would completely undermine the continued viability of a Jewish state.

“A bid for statehood does not in and of itself address the plight of the refugees,” Grandi said back in 2011. “There is no doubt in my mind that there can be no just and durable peace in the Middle East unless some five million refugees are brought out of their 63-year state of dispossession and exile.”

Less than one-sixth of this five million figure had actually experienced “dispossession” – which often was the result of a voluntary choice. Using the five million “refugee” figure, Grandi was advocating that all of these Palestinians classified as “refugees” before Palestinian independence would retain that classification even after the creation of an independent Palestinian state and the achievement of complete Palestinian self-determination. In other words, these five million Palestinians would get to choose whether to stay in the new state of Palestine or relocate to the adjoining state of Israel en masse and potentially destroy Israeli self-determination to remain a Jewish state.

In sum, while the evening commemorating Chaim Herzog’s historic speech was filled with stirring words recognizing Zionism as a positive and legitimate expression of self-determination for the Jewish people, business-as-usual at the United Nations continues to support the Palestinians’ victimhood narrative wrapped up in lies and rejectionism.