An Exercise in Extreme Moral Relativism: The UNHRC Gaza Reports

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Moral relativism, or the concept that “there is no universally valid morality, only moralities plural, each having merely local validity,”[[1]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn1) is a fallacy that is frequently used across the United Nations and its agencies. Israel is in particular targeted.[[2]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn2)  Originally, the United Nations introduced universal values in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[[3]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn3) This was a reaction to the widespread acceptance of Nazi genocidal values, something which could only be defended through moral relativism.

An extreme example of the moral relativism enacted by UN agencies are the UN Human Rights Council reports on violent conflicts in Gaza. The first was the Goldstone Report, chaired by South African human rights judge Richard Goldstone, on Israel’s 2008-2009 Operation Cast Lead. This report, which Israel refused to contribute to,[[4]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn4) was largely compiled from Gazan testimonies taken at Gaza City’s UNRWA headquarters. These sources were chosen despite the existence of much additional information which would have proved insightful.

Moral relativism is blatantly evident in the choice of information used. The 452 page report makes no mention, for example, of the Hamas charter, which calls for genocide against the Jews.[[5]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn5) The report also fails to mention Hamas’s use of private houses and civilian areas as rocket-launching pads, or its deliberate attacks on Israeli civilians.[[6]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn6) The report’s authors even disputed a statement made by Fathi Hammad, a high-ranking Hamas member, a month after the operation ended. Hammad described Hamas’ strategy as “death seeking” in its use of civilians as human shields, and of women and children, in particular, to fight “the Zionist bombing machine.”[[7]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn7)

The commission wrote that this was not indicative of Hamas strategy and that Hammad’s words did not “constitute evidence” of the use of human shields.

Only twenty pages of the report focus on Hamas attacks on Israeli civilians. Eight of these deal with rocket attacks on unrecognized Bedouin and recognized “Palestinian” villages in Southern Israel. The report claims that the dearth of information on Hamas’ targeting of Israeli civilians was due to Israel’s government’s refusal to cooperate with the investigation.[[8]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn8) However, this did not prevent the commission from exhaustive descriptions of Israel’s treatment of Arab-Israeli citizens.

Former Israeli president Shimon Peres pointed out the moral relativism in the Goldstone Report. He said that it “makes a mockery of history" and "does not distinguish between the aggressor and the defender. War is crime and the attacker is the criminal. The defender has no choice. The Hamas terror organization is the one who started the war and also carried out other awful crimes. Hamas has used terrorism for years against Israeli children."[[9]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn9)

In 2011, Goldstone wrote that he regretted the report’s demonization of Israel. He also admitted that the mission could have investigated the situation more thoroughly.[[10]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn10) He did not refer however to the report’s structural moral relativism, something that, as a judge with considerable experience, he must have realized while it was written.

Moral relativism was also frequently employed in the 2015 UNHRC-commissioned report on the 2014 Protective Edge campaign in Gaza. The statement announcing the commission proclaimed its purpose was “…to investigate all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly in the occupied Gaza Strip, in the context of the military operations conducted since 13 June 2014, whether before, during or after.”[[11]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn11) It was clear that the compilers of this report intended to judge Israel by a different moral standard than the Palestinians, as Hamas crimes against both Israelis and its own people were not to be investigated.

Initially the commission was headed by William Schabas, a human rights attorney who in the past called on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to stand trial for war crimes at the International Criminal Court. According to Netanyahu, “The committee chairman has already decided that Hamas is not a terrorist organization. Therefore, they have nothing to look for here. They should visit Damascus, Baghdad and Tripoli. They should go see ISIS, the Syrian army and Hamas. There they will find war crimes, not here.”[[12]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn12)

This report, released in June 2015, begins with the demonization of Israel for not cooperating with UN researchers. The report goes on to thank “The State of Palestine” for its cooperation. Israel is not once termed “The State of Israel” in the report, but the term “The State of Palestine” is consistently used throughout, although both are recognized as states by the UN. The commission also thanks “authorities” in Gaza for their cooperation. As Gaza is ruled by Hamas terrorists, these “authorities” were likely Hamas members.

The report blames Israel, without evidence, for intentionally planning attacks during Ramadan meals or when families were asleep. It also implies that despite Israel’s warnings, it is still Israel’s fault that Palestinians did not leave their homes in time, because they did not understand those warnings - the “knock on the roof” advance warning of an imminent strike on a building, or the leaflets and radio announcements in Arabic telling Gazans to evacuate. This in addition to Israel’s not taking into consideration “the fact that many places considered safe were already overcrowded; and the poor conditions in shelters, which themselves came under attack.”[[13]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn13)

The poor conditions of shelters in southern Israel are not considered worthy of mention. Mention of Hamas rocket attacks on the Jewish fast day Tisha B’av, the same day a 72-hour ceasefire was supposed to go into effect[[14]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn14) are also absent.

The report adds: “In some instances, Palestinian armed groups in Gaza reportedly attempted to warn civilians in Israel of imminent attacks. For instance, on 20 August 2014, the Al-Qassam Brigades warned communities near Gaza to avoid returning home or to remain inside shelters.” But, it does not mention whether these “warnings” reached Israel, or were in Hebrew, unlike all Israeli warnings, which are professionally translated into Arabic.[[15]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn15) The Israeli warnings were systematic; the pro-Hamas authors of the UNHRC Gaza report only mentioned one Gazan warning.

Within the broader framework of the widespread UN moral relativism with Israel as a target, the two Gaza reports are amongst the most extreme examples of the agency’s double standards concerning values. Many others can be found as we have illustrated within the UNHRC itself and UNESCO. [[16]](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/Articles/Article.aspx/17504#_ftn16)

**Sources:**

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