

## **Spreading the Hate: How UK funded NGOs pursue a radical anti-Israel agenda**

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The aim of this paper will be to reveal the many ways in which UK based NGOs have been actively pursuing a hostile anti-Israel agenda in recent years. These organisations have disproportionately singled out Israel for attack, often during times of heightened Middle East conflict, and made repeated allegations of war crimes and apartheid. At the same time, they have systematically ignored Palestinian terror and rejectionism, crucial factors in the continuing impasse. Such an agenda contradicts their claims to impartiality or to holding progressive, enlightened and peaceful values. Among the organisations examined are Amnesty, Christian Aid, War on Want, World Vision, The Amos Trust, Oxfam and Save the Children.

These NGOs have built up a formidable reputation for promoting justice and human rights. They are usually treated with automatic deference and respect, as if they were beacons of moral enlightenment guiding us towards a more civilised world. In many ways, they do valuable work in uncovering abuses of international law and human rights – but not when it comes to Israel and the conflict in the Middle East. On this subject, they have become highly politicised, promoting a view so critical of Israel and so one sided in approach as to betray a complete lack of impartiality. They have become part of the propaganda war against the Jewish state.

All except Save the Children are registered organisations with the Charity Commission. The Commission has issued specific guidance for campaigning and political activity by registered charities. Such campaigning is legitimate provided that it is carried out to help deliver its charitable purposes. Even emotive or controversial material can form part of a campaign, provided this is lawful or justifiable, but charities must ensure that the material used is 'factually accurate' with a 'legitimate evidence base.'<sup>1</sup> The evidence collected here casts doubt on whether all the material collected by charities is factually accurate, though more often, the claims made about Israel are more politically biased or legally dubious, problems that are not covered by the Commission's guidance. More importantly, charities cannot have a political purpose and political activities can only be undertaken in the context of a wider purpose. The Charity Commission has already investigated War on Want following a complaint that it is an explicitly political organisation, and it may be hoped that other investigations may follow.

*Note on definition of an NGO:* An NGO (a non-governmental organisation) is a not for profit organisation which is independent of either government or governmental organisations. However, many NGOs actually receive a substantial amount of funding from governments, somewhat casting into doubt their claim to be wholly independent entities. NGOs play an influential role in political debate, lobbying for political change through extensive grassroots campaigns. Yet their officials are not elected or accountable in the way that politicians are, giving an even greater reason to challenge their often controversial views.

**Amnesty International UK** has long claimed to be wholly independent of any government, religion or political ideology. It does receive some funding from grants (1.6% in 2015), some of which has come from DfID, though the majority of its funding is from voluntary donations.<sup>2</sup> On its website, Amnesty states that it works 'independently and impartially to promote respect for all the human rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights'.<sup>3</sup> When it comes to the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict, Amnesty has questionable claim to impartiality.

Thus in October 2009, it produced a report on water resources in the territories which noted: 'Lack of access to adequate, safe, and clean water has been a longstanding problem for the Palestinian population of the Occupied Palestinian Territories'. It went on to say: 'The problem arises principally because of Israeli water policies and practices which discriminate against the Palestinian population of the OPT'. This 'discrimination' has 'resulted in widespread violations of the right to an adequate standard of living'. It concludes: 'Access to water resources by Palestinians in the OPT is controlled by Israel and the amount of water available to Palestinians is restricted to a level which does not meet their needs and does not constitute a fair and equitable share of the shared water resources.'<sup>4</sup>

The accusation that Israel has illegally and ruthlessly exploited the West Bank's water resources does not stand up to the facts. It is based on the myth that Israel has somehow reduced Palestinian access to water, and violated human rights in the process. The truth is that the direct Israeli occupation saw a significant increase in the water supply to Palestinians, in which a modern pumping system was introduced that brought water directly to Arab city centres. From 1967 till the signing of the Oslo accords, the volume of water supply for West Bank Palestinians increased dramatically.

From 1967 to 1995, West Bank Palestinians increased their domestic water use by 640%, from 5.4 MCM (million cubic metres) to 40 MCM.<sup>5</sup> Such a vast increase came about because of infrastructure changes made by Israel. 50 new wells were drilled for the Palestinian population, while hundreds of kilometres of new water mains were laid.<sup>6</sup> As a result, hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns (97% of the population) were connected to the newly built water system.<sup>7</sup>

The reasons for Palestinian water shortages also owe much to poor decisions taken by the leadership. Thus the Palestinian Authority has not exploited a major water source in the eastern aquifer flowing beneath the Jordan Valley. 40 potential drilling sites have been identified but, despite vast foreign funds flowing to the PA, drilling has taken place in only a fraction of those places, despite the fact that the international community has said it will fund drilling at all the sites. There is also tremendous wastage in the Palestinian water system (a 33% rate of water loss as opposed to 10% in Israel) and the urban water infrastructure has been neglected. The PA simply does not spend time fixing water leaks in city pipes.

The Palestinian Authority, in defiance of the Oslo accords, has not built water treatment plants, meaning that sewage flows into Palestinian villages and streams, causing extensive pollution. The PA has had significant funds earmarked for sewage treatment, so as to deal with wastewater, but hardly any investment has been made. In addition, the PA has refused to use drip irrigation technology, something that would reduce water consumption by half. All of these inefficiencies fly in the face of the core principle of sustainable development.<sup>8</sup>

In an overview for Israel and occupied Palestinian territories for 2015/2016, Amnesty outlines a catalogue of alleged Israeli crimes.<sup>9</sup> It accuses Israel of carrying out 'unlawful killings of Palestinian civilians' and detaining Palestinians who merely 'protested against or otherwise opposed Israel's continuing military occupation'. It talks of the 'illegal settlements in the West Bank', of 'extrajudicial executions by Israeli forces' and how Israel 'severely restricted Palestinians' freedom of movement'. Focusing on Gaza, Amnesty condemns the 'collective punishment' of the Israeli blockade. Though there is mention of Arab individuals carrying out acts of terror, this is qualified by saying that these people were not 'affiliated with armed groups'.

Israeli actions are rarely given proper context with only cursory references to violent Palestinian behaviour. The fact that Israel has been under constant threat of terror, from both Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, is overlooked in favour of a deeper narrative that accuses Israel of illegal

and disproportionate behaviour. Nowhere does Amnesty acknowledge the one million Israelis subjected to the indiscriminate rocket fire from Gaza's missiles or the daily threat of terror emanating from the West Bank, or the constant incitement from Fatah. Both Egypt as well as Israel impose border controls on Gaza due to their shared concerns about terror.

The blockade of Gaza is never put into context: that there are thousands of tons of weapons being smuggled into the enclave, together with other goods that can be converted into weapons, and these have been used to target Israeli civilians. Amnesty condemns settler violence (understandably) but there is scarcely a mention of the Jews killed in attacks on settlements.

Amnesty condemns the closure of the northern branch of the Islamic movement in 2015 as a violation of freedom of expression. This ignores the fact that the movement, with its links to radical Islam, was accused of incitement against Israelis and encouraging terrorism.

In a report from 2014 called *Trigger Happy: Israel's use of excessive force in the West Bank*, Amnesty accused Israel of carrying out "war crimes and other serious violations of international law."<sup>10</sup> After saying that soldiers in the IDF were guilty of "a callous disregard for human life", it went on to demand a cessation of the arms trade with Israel.

According to Philip Luther, Amnesty's Middle East director, 'Israeli forces have brazenly flouted the laws of war by carrying out a series of attacks on civilian homes (and displaying callous indifference to the carnage caused'. It seems not to occur to Amnesty that some of these 'civilian' homes were targeted because they were used to harbour terrorists hiding under civilian camouflage. Moreover, it ignores the many strenuous efforts made by the IDF to limit civilian casualties, though the report did slam Hamas' use of human shields.<sup>11</sup>

Amnesty would reject claims that it is ignoring the reality of modern anti-Semitism. But their claim to sensitivity would ring hollow, considering that at their annual conference in April 2015, Amnesty members decided to reject a motion to tackle the rise in antisemitic attacks in Britain. It was the only motion to be defeated at the conference, leading at least one member to protest.<sup>12</sup>

Research bias: Amnesty's failure to provide impartiality might be best explained by the bias of their researchers. Deborah Hyams joined Amnesty in 2010 after spending a decade engaged in pro Palestinian advocacy. In 2001, she volunteered as a human shield in Beit Jala and later defended

the use of violence in response to the occupation. A year later, she explained suicide bombing as a 'response to the occupation'. In 2008 she signed a letter saying that Israel was 'a state founded on terrorism, massacres and the dispossession of another people from their land'.<sup>13</sup>

Such clear political partisanship should have been enough to prevent her from being hired by Amnesty. In 2013, the head of Amnesty's Finnish branch, Frank Johansson, wrote a blog which appeared in Finland's third largest newspaper, in which he described Israel as a 'scum state'.<sup>14</sup> Later, he stood by his comment, claiming that Israel had 'repeatedly flouted international law'. When asked if he could name another country fitting that description, he was unable to do so.

In 2014, Kristyan Benedict, the campaigns manager for Amnesty UK, compared Israel to the Islamic State. After Israel had denounced an Amnesty report into the 2014 war, Benedict published a tweet with the hashtag JSIL. This has been used by anti-Israel groups to draw this insidious parallel. A year earlier, he produced another tweet (for which he was censured) in which he tried to link British Jewish MPs to Israeli actions in Gaza: 'Louise Ellman, Robert Halfon and Luciana Berger walk into a bar...each orders a round of B52s #Gaza'.<sup>15</sup>

It is little surprise that Amnesty has found time to host anti Israel activist Ben White. They hosted a book launch in 2012 for his volume *Palestinians in Israel: segregation, discrimination and democracy*. White has been at the forefront of claims that Israel is an apartheid state and is himself no stranger to controversy. In 2014, in an article for Counterpunch, White said the following; I do not consider myself an anti-Semite, yet I can also understand why some are.<sup>16</sup>

One of his reasons was because of 'the state of Israel, its ideology of racial supremacy and its subsequent crimes committed against the Palestinians.' His claim that Zionism is an ideology of racial supremacy is wholly baseless and malicious. It is tantamount to denying that Jews, as a nation, have the same legitimate rights as any other people. Worse, White was attempting to sanitise anti-Semitism, reducing it to a regrettable reaction to Israel's alleged misdeeds rather than understanding that it is a wholly irrational worldview rooted in dark conspiracy thinking. Amnesty should have distanced itself from such a controversial figure, but chose not to.

Such incendiary and provocative language is bad enough when it comes from mature political activists. But there is clearly no place for it among researchers for a supposedly 'impartial' human rights organisation.

**Christian Aid** campaigns on a range of issues concerning poverty and justice, speaking out against what it sees as unfair government policies. It receives a considerable amount of public money for these purposes. In 2014/5, DfiD extended the charity's Programme Partnership Arrangement for a further two years to March 2016, providing a grant worth £14,600,000, while the European Commission provided a £5.14m grant in the same period.<sup>17</sup> In 2013, this institutional income constituted over two fifths of the charity's funding.<sup>18</sup>

The charity has a long history of promoting anti-Israel views. For example, on 27th January 2010 the charity decided to launch an attack on President Shimon Peres to coincide with Holocaust Memorial Day. An article on its online youth magazine, written by disabled anti-Israel activist Jody McIntyre<sup>19</sup>, accused Peres of being a 'war criminal'. It was telling that Peres was attacked, given that he was a symbol of the peace camp and of the many attempts to reach a two state solution. Worse, photos in the article juxtaposed images of Jewish victims of the Holocaust with dead Palestinians, making the kind of comparisons that are usually found on far left and far right conspiracy groups.

In its report *Facts on the Ground*,<sup>20</sup> Christian Aid attacked the separation barrier, finding that it was an 'attempt to ensure that settlements fall within the future borders of the state of Israel.' This represented a clear attempt to deny the obvious reason for its construction, namely that it was designed to prevent suicide bombers entering Israel amid a wave of murderous terror in the second intifada.

In the same document, the authors show concern for the 'huge rise in poverty levels' among Palestinians but place the blame on the occupation and settlements. 'EU taxpayers,' it goes on to say, 'have the right to ask how much longer their money will be squandered due to a lack of a concerted political effort to confront Israeli policies which have made that aid necessary.' Yet those taxpayers also have the right to ask why the Palestinian Authority chose to siphon much of that aid into the building of a vast terrorist infrastructure which was used to start an intifada lasting 5 years (from 2000-5). By failing to mention this or the Palestinian leadership's refusal to accept a peace proposal in 2000-1, the charity reveals a very one sided approach to the conflict.

The report speaks of 'repression and bloodshed on both sides' of the conflict. Such language suggests that there is a legal or moral equivalence between deliberate and indiscriminate terror against Israelis and Israel's own legal counter terror responses. Christian Aid ends by making a

series of recommendations in its report, including the dismantling of the security barrier, the freezing of all settlement activity, the end to Israeli occupation and the lifting of roadblocks, curfews and checkpoints. They call on the EU to ensure 'transparency, accountability and democratic principles' within the Palestinian government. There is no call for an end to Palestinian terrorism, incitement and rejectionist behaviour in other words.

In another report *Breaking Down The Barriers*, Christian Aid describes settlements as 'illegal under international law' and claims that their expansion 'undermines the right of the Palestinian people to self determination, which is critical for a viable solution to the conflict'. The first point relies on a tendentious interpretation of the 1949 Geneva Convention, with its prohibition against 'transfer of population' into an occupied area.

In essence, no Israeli government has ever forcibly transferred Jewish civilians into the West Bank and so the argument for illegality fails to stack up. While settlement expansion has been controversial and polarising within Israel, the pamphlet ignores the other crucial barriers to peace, including Palestinian rejectionism and terror, while it seems to show no concern for Israel's legitimate security needs. It makes no mention of the many attempts Israel has made to reach a division of the land, including very recently. The Palestinians would have had self determination if their leaders had accepted the offers of partition made in 1937, 1947, 2000-1 and 2008. Not surprisingly, Christian Aid offers its supporters a template letter to send to MPs, calling for legislation to boycott settlement produce in the UK. This letter claims that 'it is morally wrong for their products to have access to our market.'

In a June 2011 report *Locked Out: Palestinian Refugees and the key to peace*,<sup>21</sup> Christian Aid calls for a just resolution of the refugee problem. It cites General Assembly Resolution 194 as the basis for a 'right of return' of Palestinian refugees to their homes, or restitution. It also cites figures suggesting that there are some 4.8 million such refugees and squarely lays the blame for their current plight on Israel's shoulders. 'For Palestinian refugees,' the report says, 'the individual and collective inalienable right of return cannot be negotiated away'.

These arguments are misguided. For one thing, the number of Palestinian refugees is vastly inflated, considering that the maximum number of those displaced in the conflict between November 1947 and January 1949 is thought to be no more than 700,000. Under the 1951 refugee convention, one does not count as refugees the descendants of those who were forced to flee

their homeland. A special exception was made for Palestinian refugees, with a new agency created for their benefit (UNRWA), leading to a wholly false inflation of refugee numbers.

In any case, Resolution 194 was non-binding as it was a General Assembly, not a Security Council resolution. But in addition, it stipulated that refugees (Jewish or Arab) *should* return (not *must* return) if they were prepared to live in peace with their neighbours, and there was little contemporary evidence that this would have been the case, something that remains true to this day. In any case, if vast numbers did 'return' it would spell the demographic dissolution of Israel as a Jewish state, contradicting the idea that the exercise of such a right could ever lead to a viable political outcome.

These reports show that deep anti-Israel bias pervades Christian Aid's Middle East operations. It seems more willing to create a distorted and one sided picture of life on the ground than building genuine opportunities for mutual co-existence.

**War on Want** says it has 'always been at the forefront of many of the debates on global poverty and injustice'. It calls for people to 'join forces with us against the root causes of global poverty, inequality and injustice'. For many years, it received some public funding. In 2014, it received a £196,101 grant from DfiD and a year later, £65,380. In 2015, it also received a grant of £130,733 from the European Commission and £182,349 from Comic Relief, also publicly funded.<sup>22</sup>

War on Want may be the most hostile of all UK based charities towards Israel. It appears progressive, yet constantly employs the most vituperative rhetoric to demonise Israel and portray it as the primary barrier to achieving a just and durable peace. The Jewish state stands accused of 'ethnic cleansing' the Palestinians, of committing 'war crimes' in Gaza, of engaging in 'collective punishment' and being a Western backed 'apartheid' state. It has written reports which are partnered with the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, a group that openly indulges the antisemitic Hamas and which supports BDS.

A typical example of its egregious misrepresentations can be found in their booklet *Arming Apartheid*. Here they call on the UK government to 'implement an immediate two-way arms embargo to end all arms sales to and purchases from Israel.'<sup>23</sup> They accuse Israel of holding 'Gaza under siege since 2007' and say that this is tantamount to 'effectively imprisoning the Palestinian



population of Gaza and limiting their supply of essential goods such as food, medicines and construction material’.

In addition, ‘The Israeli army’s primary ongoing task is to enforce the Occupation of the Palestinian land and people.’ According to War on Want, ‘Israel uses arms to wage war on the Palestinian people, and to maintain the systematic and institutionalised oppression of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza.’ Moreover, it accuses Israel of maintaining an apartheid regime in the occupied territories, one based on policies of racial segregation.

The notion that Gaza remains under Israeli occupation belies the legal reality. There has been no Israeli military or civilian presence in Gaza since 2005 with Hamas now the territory’s sovereign. Israel therefore lacks effective control of the territory, a necessary component of occupation. As Tristan Ferraro, legal advisor to the International Red Cross, has observed: “In general, the obligations and rights conferred upon the Occupying Power by IHL require, to be given effect, its physical presence in the occupied territory.”<sup>24</sup> Occupation requires setting up an administration to ensure that the occupant can discharge its obligations.

The reasons for the naval blockade and the border controls (imposed by both Israel and Egypt) are one and the same: Gaza is a *hostile* territory. Since 2005, when the last Israeli soldier left Gaza to its new rulers (the PA until the 2007 coup), thousands of rockets and mortars have been fired from the territory on to Israeli towns and cities. These indiscriminate and unprovoked attacks have killed more than 20 people, mostly civilians, and nearly one million Israelis live in areas that have come under sustained missile attack. The government of Israel has an obligation, never mind an entitlement, to defend its citizens from attack.

It is entirely false to accuse Israel of practising apartheid in the West Bank. Palestinians are not citizens of Israel and this fact, rather than a racial bar, explains why they do not vote in Israel. The Palestinian Authority has responsibility for the civic and economic life of the West Bank’s Arab population and it organises elections for its population, just as Gaza’s political affairs are controlled by Hamas. All military restrictions, deeply regrettable as they are for innocent Palestinians, exist for one sole purpose: the protection of Israeli civilians. It is true that Palestinians cannot access roads in the West Bank like Israelis can, but the reasons are connected to national security, not race. Arabs in Israel use these roads too and they are ethnically very similar to West Bank Palestinians.

This is not to gloss over some of the less comfortable aspects of occupation or to ignore the difficulties that it imposes on innocent civilians. It is not to argue that a just peace settlement is not badly needed for both sides. But there is no apartheid.

It is not surprising that War on Want endorses calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS). In their booklet which goes by the same name, they list a catalogue of Israel's alleged crimes, especially in Gaza over the last decade. Nowhere in *War on Want's* diatribe is there even a cursory reference to Israel's legitimate security needs. There is no mention of Palestinian terrorism, violence, incitement and corruption. The Hamas Charter, which calls for the destruction of Israel and the genocide of Jews around the world, does not merit a mention.

War on Want would have you believe that this conflict matters above all others. In their 'Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions' booklet, they claim that 'The catastrophe facing the Palestinian people is the defining global justice issue of our time.' This cannot reflect the actual death toll among countries engaged in continuous conflict because from 1967 until 2014, around 10,000 Palestinians were killed in conflict with Israel, not all of them civilians.

This figure is easily dwarfed in magnitude by the number of people killed in a myriad of conflicts ranging from those that have convulsed Congo, Afghanistan, Korea, Cambodia, Vietnam, Iraq and Sudan. Indeed even in the Middle East, the defining catastrophe of the last 5 years has been the Syrian Civil War which has killed in excess of 400,000 people. Yet War on Want promotes its anti-Israel agenda with an intensity bordering on obsessiveness. War on Want is not the progressive charity its advocates would have you believe. It is a highly politicised organisation with an anti-Israel fixation that it pursues relentlessly.

**World Vision** also claims to be a progressive organisation, 'working to bring real hope to millions of children in the world's hardest places'. It too has received plenty of public money in the UK. In 2014 alone, DfiD provided a grant of £20,887,588.<sup>25</sup> In its analysis of the Arab-Israeli conflict, World Vision adopts a highly politicised agenda which lays the blame for the impoverishment of Palestinian children almost entirely at Israel's door.

World Vision sponsored and supported the 2011 documentary 'With God on our Side' which launched a stinging attack on Christian Zionist support for Israel. It features a number of American Evangelical figures who cite Biblical verses, interpreted literally, to justify anti-Palestinian

positions. These people are seen as one of the reasons why there is such staunch (and unjustified) support for Israel, especially in the US, and they are viewed as a barrier to peace. The film urges support for Palestinians as the true figures of suffering.

However, it is full of misrepresentations and historical inaccuracies, leaving out important facts about the continual Jewish presence in the Holy Land, the history of Arab anti-Semitism and the legal basis for Zionism. Zionism is defined by Rev. Stephen Sizer as 'a political system that believes that the Jews have the right to much of the land of the Middle East'. Actually, a more accurate definition would be that it is a movement of national self determination of the Jewish people in a land with which they already had an intimate and long standing connection. And crucially, the amount of land they sought was a tiny sliver of the entire region! At one point, the film shows an Israeli flag extending over huge swathes of Biblical territory in neighboring countries, giving a wholly misleading impression about the current government's intentions.

The film lays the blame for the conflict on decisions taken by Zionists from 1897 onwards. It omits to mention that the Zionist goal became the official policy of the League of Nations in 1922, and that the movement was validated under international law. At one point, it features a completely fabricated quote from David Ben Gurion about how Palestine's Arabs would have to be removed from the country. Ben Gurion said no such thing and the quote comes instead from Ilan Pappé, a well known falsifier of the Israeli historical record. The experts chosen in the film, such as Pappé and Ben White, are presented as neutral experts offering informed views on the conflict. In reality, they are partisan activists adopting intensely one sided perspectives. While the film's compassion for Palestinian children is to be commended, it sets out to demonise Israel and effectively give a free pass to Hamas and Fatah.

In an article from 2013, World Vision condemned the Israeli security barrier for dividing Palestinian villages and restricting freedom of movement.<sup>26</sup> It was described as 'currently 708 kilometers in length and planned to be four times longer than the Berlin Wall and in some places twice as high'.

This creates the impression that the barrier is oppressive and designed to lock Palestinians in the West Bank, much as the Berlin Wall prevented the escape of Germans from east to west. In reality, the barrier (only a small section of which is a concrete fence) is designed to prevent suicide bombers from entering Israel, though you would never know from this article. It is true that the

barrier does hinder innocent Palestinians and may have an impact on economic growth. But the language used to describe the barrier is somewhat misleading.

Worse, the organisation also stands accused of funding terrorism directly. In August 2016, the Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, arrested a senior employee of the charity who worked in Gaza. Mohammed el-Halabi was accused of siphoning millions of charity funds and transferring them to Hamas, enabling the terror group to expand its network of tunnels and purchase quantities of weapons.<sup>27</sup> It is estimated that 60% of funds in Gaza were funneled to the terrorist group.

It is certainly not unknown for terror operatives or sympathisers to hide behind humanitarian organisations as cover for their militant activities. Yet World Vision's response was effectively one of denial. 'Based on the information available to us at this time, we have no reason to believe that the allegations are true'.<sup>28</sup> Instead of being 'shocked' at the allegations, World Vision would do well to correct its own myopic view of the conflict.

**The Amos Trust** claims to offer 'justice and hope for the forgotten'. Yet like many other NGOs, the Trust has at times been blind to the hatred emanating from Palestinian leaders. Much of the violence on Temple Mount has been fuelled by incitement from Mahmoud Abbas and others, with false claims that Jews were trying to take over Temple Mount. Yet according to the Trust's director, Rev. Chris Rose:

'The waves of violence that have been happening have been in no small part pushed by Jewish extremist groups and the Israeli government has not been effective in countering them'.<sup>29</sup> Not only is Palestinian incitement not mentioned here but a false picture is created whereby Israeli murder victims are, in effect, the victims of fellow Jewish extremism. There is clear historical distortion too. It is regarded as 'extremist' for religious Jews to flock to Temple Mount, as if this area was of no importance to this community when it is in fact the holiest site for Jews in the world.

The Amos Trust has produced a Bethlehem Pack<sup>30</sup> aimed at children. It contains deeply politicized messages, including this one: "If Jesus was born today in Bethlehem, the Wise Men would spend several hours queuing to enter the town. The shepherds, despite being residents of Bethlehem, would struggle to graze their sheep as their land, annexed by the building of the Separation Wall

and inaccessible became of a lack of freedom to travel and restrictions on trade, make it impossible for them to earn a living.” The reality is that a modern day Jewish Jesus, without the security of a barrier or checkpoints, could easily be murdered or maimed by a suicide bomber.

The Amos Trust also encourages Sunday schools to get children to make a ‘replica of a house’ and a ‘piece of paper or a sign representing a demolition order’ and then act out the roles of “Palestinians who own the house; Israeli soldiers (to knock down the house); UK volunteers (a larger group) to rebuild the house.” In 2007, the Trust sold a Nativity scene in olive wood which was updated to include the separation barrier. (An updated £50 deluxe edition made the barrier removable, in case peace came).

According to Canon Garth Hewitt, director of Amos Trust and guild vicar of All Hallows on the Wall, London: "Most people don't realise how cut off Bethlehem is now and how difficult life is for the people living there. We are selling these nativity scenes in the hope that people will give a thought to those living in the little town this Christmas." <sup>31</sup>

The Amos Trust should be offering a more nuanced understanding of why there has been such a tragic decline in the Palestinian Christian population. The declining number of Christians living in the West Bank and Gaza owes far more to the gradual Islamisation of those territories than to the ongoing political conflict. It has been estimated that two thirds of Palestinian Christians fled the West Bank and Gaza between 1949 and 1967, the period before Israel’s occupation started. The Christian population in the Old City of Jerusalem also declined, largely owing to discriminatory policies introduced by Jordan. Whereas Bethlehem had a Christian majority of two thirds when Israel handed the town over to the PA in 1995, its Christian population now numbers one fifth. <sup>32</sup>

Demographic factors can also help explain the population loss, including the fact that Muslims in Palestinian areas marry earlier than Christians and tend to have much larger families. Attributing the Christian decline to one factor (Israeli policy) is misleading and inaccurate.

**Oxfam’s** mission is to fight poverty and offer humanitarian aid to suffering people around the world. In 2013/2014, it received over 75 million Euros from EU governments, of which the UK would have been a significant contributor. <sup>33</sup> When it comes to Israel, it has long promoted a biased, one sided viewpoint on the conflict in which the Jewish state is the prime villain in the conflict and the main impediment to peace.

Oxfam has focused a great deal on Palestinian civilian suffering and impoverishment, which is not surprising. But in castigating Israel for allegedly causing such suffering, Oxfam fails to take into account the military content for her actions, in particular how the terror threat might impact on Israel's security measures. Thus when the MV Mavi Marmara tried to forcibly break the Israeli naval blockade, with the resulting death of 10 people following the storming of the ship by Israeli commandos, Oxfam condemned one side only. In a statement, Oxfam's executive director Jeremy Hobbs declared:

*"Tragedy struck as the international community failed to put enough pressure on Israel to put an end to the crippling policy of blockade. This flotilla would not have been needed, had the Israeli blockade not debilitated Gaza's economy and prevented desperately needed humanitarian supplies from entering the territory."*<sup>34</sup>

This is a somewhat distorted view. A flotilla set out, not to fill the gaps in the humanitarian aid effort, but to break an Israeli blockade which was designed to prevent terrorists from acquiring lethal weapons in Gaza and thus protect Israeli lives. In any case, Israel offered to transfer humanitarian supplies on the ships and send it to Gaza, which it largely did. Many of those on board the Marmara were armed with knives and other weapons, indicating that they anticipated a violent confrontation, points that Hobbs completely ignored.

Oxfam's refusal to consider the terrorism dimension, and its obsession with laying all blame for Palestinian suffering at Israel's door, reached its apotheosis in the 2014 conflict. Oxfam UK produced a report which focused on the humanitarian consequences of Operation Protective Edge without considering how the war came about, namely after Hamas launched hundreds of rockets on Israel, followed by several thousand more after the war commenced, built a network of tunnels under Israeli soil with the presumed intention of carrying out murders and abduction, then refused to consider multiple calls for a ceasefire. Hamas is also considered to be a leading terrorist organisation by the US government, the EU and many other countries.<sup>35</sup>

The report rather lazily repeats the Palestinian narrative that Israel attacked purely civilian targets, despite a plethora of evidence that many such buildings (including mosques, schools and hospitals) had been militarised and used for weapons storage. It does not take into account the civilian damage caused by Hamas' secondary explosions or the human shields policy. By the same token, little consideration is given to the vast number of Israelis who have been forced to live with

the consequences of terror for many years. The report laments the restrictions on freedom of movement between Israel and Gaza, without asking why such restrictions have been put in place. The report ends by demanding an end to the separation policy and calling for the cessation of the blockade, with only a mere mention of 'Israel's legitimate security needs' appearing afterwards.

Though Oxfam states that it does not support boycotts of Israel per se, it does promote boycotts of settlement produce, given that it regards Israeli settlements as illegal and a means of exacerbating Palestinian impoverishment. Thus it has called on the EU to take 'urgent and concrete measures to push for an immediate end to settlement construction and the unlawful demolition of Palestinian civilian infrastructure.'<sup>36</sup> In 2014, Oxfam's insistence on boycotting settlement goods saw Scarlett Johansson forced to resign as an Oxfam ambassador. Johansson had previously had signed a contract agreeing to be the spokesman and ambassador for Sodastream. The actress hit back at critics who were unhappy at her fronting the company:

*SodaStream is a company that is not only committed to the environment but to building a bridge to peace between Israel and Palestine, supporting neighbours working alongside each other, receiving equal pay, equal benefits and equal rights. That is what is happening in their Ma'ale Adumim factory every working day. As part of my efforts as an ambassador for Oxfam, I have witnessed firsthand that progress is made when communities join together and work alongside one another and feel proud of the outcome of that work in the quality of their product and work environment, in the pay they bring home to their families and in the benefits they equally receive."*<sup>37</sup>

However, these points clearly made little impression on Oxfam. The charity's claim of Palestinian impoverishment is actually highly contestable. The charity should have consulted the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics which calculated in 2011 that the 'average daily wages for settlement workers were 150 shekels (\$44) per day, compared to 76.9 (\$22) in the West Bank and 46.2 (\$13.50) in Gaza.'<sup>38</sup> Similar results were obtained by the PCBS three years later, contradicting Oxfam's claims.<sup>39</sup>

Oxfam has also called on the EU to impose sanctions against Israel over its policy towards Gaza and accuses Israel of engaging in a form of 'collective punishment' which 'constitutes collective punishment, which is illegal under international law'.<sup>40</sup> In one statement, Oxfam has said: 'The people of Gaza are living in the world's largest prison but have fewer rights than convicts'.<sup>41</sup>

Yet there is nothing illegal in Israel imposing a naval blockade around Gaza, as the 2011 UN Palmer report made clear.<sup>42</sup> Gazans are not prisoners of Israel so much as victims of the Hamas regime that not only prohibits essential freedoms but uses its people as pawns in a struggle with Israel. Gaza has become a hostile territory from which thousands of rockets and missiles have been launched indiscriminately and without provocation onto Israeli communities. Israel has therefore imposed border controls (as has Egypt) as an essential measure of self defence, while nonetheless allowing thousands of tons of humanitarian aid to enter Gaza every week. Oxfam's humanitarian mission has therefore been sullied by its deeply politicised work on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

**Save the Children**, a charity rather than NGO, has also become deeply politicised. In the 2009 Gaza war, the charity called for an immediate ceasefire to 'stop the suffering' taking place in the territory. It was noticeably silent during the days leading up to the 'violence' during which time hundreds of rockets were being fired at Israeli civilians who were forced into underground shelters as a result. In 2014, they published a one page advert in British newspapers with the names of the children that had died thus far in Gaza, saying that this was an 'outrage' and a 'stain on the world's conscience'.<sup>43</sup> What was missing here was context. There was no mention of the fact that Hamas had chosen to launch the war in the first place, no mention of the many ceasefire proposals put forward by Israel which Hamas rejected, no mention of the use of Palestinians as human shields and no mention of the Hamas charter.

The reader was left to think that Israel alone was to blame for this 'outrage', together with pro Israeli governments around the world. It went on to condemn 'all indiscriminate attacks on civilians in Gaza and Israel', as if to compare Hamas' indiscriminate and murderous rocket attacks with Israel's targeted and lawful responses. Like World Vision, Save the Children has faced allegations that one of its Palestinian employees was recruited by Hamas.<sup>44</sup>

Conclusion: These NGOs and charities benefit from a 'halo effect'. Their aims are generally progressive and enlightened and it is often assumed that their viewpoints are equally fair-minded and beyond reproach. Unlike governments, NGOs in the charitable sphere are given the benefit of the doubt. But these organisations have become deeply politicised, especially when it comes to the Arab-Israeli conflict. All assume that Israel is the prime instigator of the conflict with the Palestinians and that she is the main reason for poverty and suffering in Gaza and the West Bank. They uncritically adopt a Palestinian narrative, making their analyses highly one sided and methodologically suspect, and frequently make spurious and legally inaccurate claims based on



partisan research. For all their good work in a host of other areas, they are clearly failing to offer anything constructive on this conflict. They must be held to account for the views they are promoting, ones which fly in the face of all reasonable attempts to bring justice to both Israelis and Palestinians alike.

<b>NGO/Charity</b>	<b>Charity Commission registered Y/N with no.</b>	<b>Income (based on returns for Sept 2015)</b>	<b>Major funders/sponsors (see ngomonitor.org)</b>
Amnesty Int.	Y (294230)	£61,743,000 (2014)	Voluntary; DFID; EU governments; US govt.
Christian Aid	Y (1105851)	£99,912,000	
War on Want	Y (208724)	£2,114,087	In 2015, included DFID and EU.
World Vision	Y (285908)	\$2.8 billion (2014)	Many government donors, including EU, UK, US. Public funding of \$394 million.
The Amos Trust	Y (1164234)	-	Include Kairos Palestine, Holy Land Trust, and Wi'am Conflict Resolution Centre
Oxfam International	Y (202918)	947.1 million Euros (2013-4)	42% from institutional funding, including EU governments
Save the Children International	Y (1076822)	£656,844,834	US government grants; EU countries' funding

## NOTES

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