

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپائی

The Nation

Israel's Assault on Human Rights

Neve Gordon
January 12, 2011

Imagine a college student returning to her university after spending Christmas break at home. At the airport she logs on to the Internet to double check some of the sources she used in her final take-home exam for the course “Introduction to Human Rights.” She gets online and begins to surf the web; however, she soon realizes that the websites of Amnesty International [1] and Human Rights Watch [2] are blocked. She calls the service provider’s 800 number, only to find out that all human rights organizations’ websites have indeed been restricted and that they can no longer be accessed from the airport.

This, you are probably thinking, cannot happen in the United States. Such practices are common in China, North Korea and Syria, but not in liberal democracies that pride themselves on the basic right to freedom of expression.

In the United States students *can* of course access human rights websites, no matter where they surf from. But in Israel, which is also known as the only democracy in the Middle East, human rights websites as well as the websites of some extreme right-wing organizations cannot be accessed from Ben-Gurion [3], the country’s only international airport.

If this attack on freedom of expression was merely an isolated incident, one might be able to conclude that it was a mistake. Yet the restriction of human rights websites is actually part of a well-orchestrated assault carried out by the current government and legislature

against Israel's democratic institutions, procedures and practices. A spate of anti-democratic bills [4], now in the process of being ratified in the Israeli Knesset, render it a crime to support any ideology that poses alternatives to conservative interpretations of Zionism, such as support for the notion that Israel should be a democracy for all its citizens.

In early January forty-one (versus sixteen) Knesset members voted in favor of a proposal to establish a parliamentary inquiry commission [5] into the funding of Israeli human rights organizations. MK Fania Kirshenbaum, who submitted the proposal, accused human rights groups of providing material to the Goldstone commission [6], which investigated Israel's 2008-09 Gaza offensive.

Considering that the funding of all human rights organizations in Israel is made public each year and scrutinized by the state auditor, the idea of creating a parliamentary commission to inspect their income is merely a smokescreen. The parliamentary commission's actual goal is to intimidate Israeli rights groups and their donors and, as a result, stifle free speech.

MK Kirshenbaum said as much when she accused the rights organizations of being "behind the indictments lodged against Israeli officers and officials around the world." The majority of Knesset members supporting Kirshenbaum's proposal wish to deter human rights organizations from making use of international human rights law and universal jurisdiction. They thus want to deprive Israeli rights groups of their most basic tools, the tools deployed to criticize rights-abusive policies. They might not oppose human rights groups, but they certainly do not want human rights work. In their myopic minds, the problem is not Israel's unethical practices, but the organizations that reveal them.

The ongoing delegitimization of those watchdogs of democracy—human rights NGOs, the press and public intellectuals—is leading Israel down a steep and slippery slope. The next time someone travels through Ben-Gurion airport, he or she might not be able to access the websites of Israeli rights groups like Physicians for Human Rights [7] and B'Tselem [8], not because they have been blocked, but because the organizations have been shut down.

The question Kirshenbaum and her supporters need to ask themselves is what kind of countries attack their own human rights organizations? The answer is straightforward.