



21 June 2010

EP Meeting on the Situation of NGO's and Civil Society in Israel – Position Paper by the Coalition of Women for Peace (Israel)

Whereas the European Parliament expressed its “concern about pressures towards NGOs involved in the elaboration of the Goldstone Report and in the follow-up investigations, [calling] on authorities on all sides to refrain from any restrictive measures towards the activities of these organizations” (EP Resolution on Implementing the Goldstone Report);

Whereas the Council of the European Union has declared that: “The EU's objective is to influence third countries to carry out their obligations to respect the rights of human rights defenders and to protect them from attacks and threats from non-State actors” (European Union Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders);

Whereas the Council has acknowledged that: “In this regard it is important to apply a gender perspective when approaching the issue of human rights defenders” (ibid.);

Whereas the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 reaffirms the important role of women in conflict resolution and in peace-building, and stresses the importance of their equal participation in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace;

Therefore, the Coalition of Women for Peace would like to deliver the following statement and analysis to the honorable MEPs:

1. The Coalition of Women for Peace (CWP) is a coalition of Jewish and Palestinian Israeli feminist peace organizations, working to end the occupation, stop the siege of Gaza, resist militarism and empower and mobilize Jewish and Palestinian women in grassroots struggles for social justice and equality. CWP also works closely with international peace movements, NGOs and policy makers in order to engage the international community in the efforts to achieve a just peace for all inhabitants of the region.

2. **In the past two years, CWP has witnessed a growing wave of assaults on Israeli peace and human rights NGOs and delegitimization and persecution of Jewish and Palestinian human rights defenders.** Just a few examples are: mass arrests of hundreds of demonstrators against the Israeli assault on Gaza in 2009; Israeli police raids on the homes of members of New Profile, a CWP member-organization that works to demilitarize the Israeli society; the secret arrests of human rights defenders Ameer Makhoul (Director of the Arab NGO Network Ittijah) and Dr. Omar Said (peace activist and researcher of traditional Arab medicine); the debate in the Knesset on the revoking of the parliamentary privileges of MK Haneen Zoabi (BALAD) because of her participation in the Gaza Freedom Flotilla; and delegitimization of Israeli peace and human rights NGOs in the Israeli media, propagated by the extremist organizations Im Tirtzu and NGO Monitor.



3. **The assaults on Israeli peace and human rights NGOs have culminated in 3 proposed bills, intended to curtail the activity of these organizations. While the EP meeting on the situation of Israeli NGOs focuses on one bill, all 3 bills are a clear threat to the unimpeded work of Israeli human rights defenders.** The bills are widely supported by both coalition and opposition parties in the Knesset, and chiefly target Israeli organizations that provide information on Israeli and Palestinian human rights violations and organizations that work to engage the international community in taking measures against Israel until it ends the occupation of Palestinian lands. Because of the nature of its work, as well as the fact that it is a women's organization, CWP has been specifically targeted by these bills.

4. **The 3 proposed Knesset bills, attempting to restrict the work of Israeli peace and human rights organizations, are:**

a. **“Disclosure Requirements for Recipients of Support from a Foreign Political Entity – 2010”** (a government-backed bill, submitted on 8 February 2010, passed a preliminary vote on 17 February 2010): Under the pretext of increasing transparency of foreign funding of NGOs, this bill stipulates that organizations “seeking to influence public opinion in Israel” should be deemed as political organizations and therefore will be required to register with the Registrar of Political Parties and lose their tax-exempt status. Any spokesperson of such an organization will have to declare in all public appearances and publications that they represent an organization that receives funding from a “foreign political entity.” **This bill is intended to curtail the foreign funding that Israeli peace and human rights NGOs rely on, as well as to delegitimize and intimidate these organizations.**

b. **“Associations Law (Amendment – Exceptions to the Registration and Activity of an Association) – 2010”** (a private bill, introduced by 19 MKs on 28 April 2010, a revised version submitted by 25 MKs on 14 June 2010) – This bill aims to prohibit the registration of, or to close down any existing NGO, if “the association was involved in, or will provide information to foreign entities regarding, legal proceedings abroad against senior Israeli government officials or military officers, for war crimes.” Universal jurisdiction, the right of national courts to prosecute foreign war criminals for atrocities committed abroad, is a central enforcement mechanism in international law. **As such, this bill undermines international human rights law and the ability of Israeli NGOs to demand accountability for human rights violations committed by Israeli officials. In interviews given to the Israeli media, the MKs specifically targeted the Coalition of Women for Peace, as well as Adalah – the Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights, Physicians for Human rights and the Committee Against Torture.**

c. **“Forbidding Boycott Activity – 2010”** (introduced by 25 MKs from the coalition and the opposition on 9 June 2010, not yet submitted) – According to the bill, Israeli citizens must not initiate, encourage, or provide support or information for a boycott against the State of Israel; internationals who do so will be barred from entering Israel for at least 10 years; and foreign governmental entities who engage in boycott activity against Israel will be banned from engaging in any activity in Israeli bank accounts, Israeli stocks, or Israeli land and assets. **This bill is a violation of the freedom of speech and freedom of association and is intended to intimidate**



NGOs and individuals from engaging in a nonviolent, democratic and legitimate form of political activity. This bill also directly targets CWP, due to our research project “Who Profits from the Occupation,” which provides information on Israeli and international corporate involvement in the occupation.

5. The NGOs targeted by these public campaigns undertake the important work of reporting human rights violations, combating impunity of senior political and military officials, protecting minority groups and promoting a just peace. All of the aforementioned measures are intended to limit and impede the work of Israeli human rights defenders, to intimidate them and to delegitimize their activity.

6. Therefore, we urge the European Parliament and Member States to use any available diplomatic and legal measures to ensure that the Israeli government and parliament will cease all governmental, legislative, military and civil attempts to restrict the work of civil society organizations. In accordance with the EU Guidelines on Human Rights Defenders, we call upon the EP Subcommittee on Human Rights:

a. To condemn threats and attacks against Israeli and Palestinian human rights defenders, as well as any demarches and public statements that delegitimize and risk human rights defenders.

b. To inform Israeli authorities of their obligation to implement effective measures to protect human rights defenders and to demand that Israeli legislation and practices will be brought in line with the UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders.

c. To demand that Israel respect the freedom of thought and expression and freedom of association, protected under the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

d. To raise its concerns with regards to the growing persecution of human rights defenders, and demand that the Israeli government will undertake the necessary steps to block any existing or future legislative attempts to delegitimize, criminalize, curtail or impede the work of peace and human rights organizations, including the above-mentioned bills. In this regard, it should be noted that within the Israeli political system, it would be much more difficult to reverse an undemocratic law once it has been approved, as opposed to the possibility of blocking it before it has been approved in the Knesset. Therefore, it is imperative that the EP and Member States take urgent action to prevent the passing of these bills.

e. To ensure that financial support from European countries and the EC to Israeli and Palestinian civil society will not be restricted due to irrelevant political reasons, intended to restrict the work of peace and human rights NGOs that operate in accordance with Israeli law and international human rights law.

f. To encourage the EP and Member States to adopt a proactive policy for the protection of Israeli and Palestinian human rights defenders, with particular attention to women



human rights defenders. Such policies should be developed in close coordination and consultation with relevant NGOs on the ground, in particular those that are being targeted by the recent assaults on Israeli and Palestinian human rights defenders.

7. With regards to the Israeli participants in the upcoming meeting of the EP Subcommittee on Human Rights on the Situation of NGO's and Civil Society in Israel:

a. In light of the undeniable fact that women and girls are particularly vulnerable in situations of war and conflict; in light of the important role of women in peace-building efforts; and in light of the EU's acknowledgment that it is important to apply a gender perspective when approaching the issue of human rights defenders – it is unfortunate that there are no women among the 4 Israeli speakers in the meeting.

b. We express our concern at the fact that one of the Israeli representatives in the meeting is Prof. Gerald M. Steinberg, President of NGO Monitor. Under the legitimate guise of “independent analysis, critical debate and accountability regarding the credibility, biases, political activities and impacts” of NGOs, NGO Monitor in fact seeks to intimidate and delegitimize Israeli and international human rights organizations, among them CWP. NGO Monitor specifically targeted NGOs that reported human rights violations to the Goldstone Fact-Finding Mission. While we accept the importance of hearing all sides to a political debate, we feel that it is dangerous to accept the participation of one of the major propagators of the delegitimization and persecution of Israeli peace and human rights NGOs. We urge participating MEPs to question Prof. Steinberg as to his involvement in the civil and legislative persecution of these organizations and to demand that he cease all such actions.

8. We are greatly encouraged by the EP's involvement in protecting human rights defenders. While the protection of Israeli and Palestinian human rights defenders is crucial, we would like to remind the honorable MEPs that our work is only a means to an end, an end that the aforementioned measures and bills are intended to prevent. **It is clear that international pressure is currently one of the greatest threats to the continuation of the Israeli occupation and violations of international law. Therefore, we call upon the EP to demand that Israel will lift the siege of Gaza, end the occupation of all Palestinian lands and abide by the legal and ethical standards of international human rights and humanitarian law. In this way, the work of Israeli and Palestinian human rights defenders will not be in vain.**

Your Sincerely,

The Coalition of Women for Peace – Israel

<http://www.gaza-eng.coalitionofwomen.org>

Contact: Yoana Gonen, International Relations Coordinator
yoana@coalitionofwomen.org