

Why is the UN Human Rights Council Not Concerned About Slavery?

Commentators may debate whether the United Nations Human Rights Council is the world's most ludicrous international organization, but all will agree it is the most misnamed. Human rights, with one exception, is foreign territory to it. The UNHRC might well be renamed the official promulgator of the Palestinian Narrative of Victimhood.

On May 31, 2016 the terrorist group Hamas executed three Palestinians, two by hanging, in Gaza City. A week earlier, Hamas had called for the resumption of capital punishment. To no one's surprise the silence about this by the UNHRC has been deafening. By contrast, a UNHRC resolution of March 24, 2016, initiated by Palestinians and sponsored by a number of Arab countries, was passed by a vote of 32 for, none against, and 15 abstentions.

The resolution concerned something called "Israeli settlements in Occupied Palestinian Territory including East Jerusalem and Occupied Syrian Golan." It called for a black list, a database of all business enterprises involved in Israeli settlements. This implied not only firms concerned with settlement construction but also those involved in supply of construction materials or equipment, and financial and banking services that aid the settlements including loans and mortgages.

Ironically, the UNHRC resolution was passed on the very day registering the fifth year of the Syrian civil war, a conflict that has become not only regional but international and has brought such misery to the area and the world. The Arab commentary in the UNHRC on the day was not on the 250,000 killed or the millions of refugees caused by the war in Syria,

or the migration crisis that has consumed Europe. Instead, it was limited to the assertion that construction in the Israeli settlements undermines the regional and international efforts to reach a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian dispute.

The behavior of UNHRC as well as other international organizations, the BDS movement and activists, and so-called human rights groups, towards Israel has largely been one of disgraceful bigotry and possibly manifestations of antisemitism. This is not liberal behavior but one that is reactionary as well as counterproductive in supporting the refusal of Palestinian authorities to come to the negotiating table with Israel.

This relentless concentration of effort and energy against the Jewish State, has also meant neglecting almost entirely one of the world's real great evils, the existence of modern slavery. The UNHRC and the BDS bigots condemn products made by the labor of free individuals who may differ politically. They are not concerned with products made by slave labor.

The international community has paid little or no attention to the fact, as reported in a 2016 Global Slavery Index, that 46.8 million people are subject to some form of modern slavery. This condition is defined as possessing or controlling persons so as to deprive them of individual liberty through use, management, profit, or disposal.

Modern slavery has many dimensions. It would include domestic slavery, exploited labor, human trafficking, forced or servile marriages, sale or exploitation of children, women trapped in brothels, debt bondage, servitude, cleaning work, work without pay or under threat of penalty, removal of organs, and people subjected to violence. In modern slavery persons are exploited and cannot refuse or leave because of threats, violence, coercion, abuse of power, or deception.

The paradox is that modern slavery exists despite the fact

that all countries have declared slavery illegal. The number of slaves may well be higher because the survey in the Global Index of countries excluded places of conflict or where there was serious disruption of government functioning.

The Index is funded by the Walk Free Foundation, founded by the Australian billionaire Andrew Forrest, which had the actor Russell Crowe as its spokesperson when the 2016 Index was launched in London on May 31, 2016.

The Index presents a ranking of 167 countries based on the proportion of the population that is estimated to be in modern slavery. The countries with the highest estimated proportion are North Korea, Uzbekistan, Cambodia, India, and Qatar.

Qatar has the highest prevalence of slavery. In these countries there is forced labor, prison labor camps, forced marriages, sexual exploitation. The countries with the highest absolute numbers are India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Uzbekistan. The present US presidential candidates might note that these are countries with low cost labor that allows them to undercut US products.

The countries with the lowest estimated proportion of modern slavery are Luxembourg, Ireland, Norway, Denmark, Switzerland, Austria, Sweden, Belgium, US, Canada and Australia. These are countries with more economic wealth, less conflict, and more politically stable than the previous group of countries.

Some form of slavery is found in all the 167 countries in the Index. India is the worst with 18 million slaves, while North Korea has the highest percentage of slaves per capita. Half, 58 %, of the 45.8 million are in five countries: India, China, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Uzbekistan.

The Index ranks ten countries in the Middle East. The situation there has been worsened by ISIS, the Islamist Caliphate, which, among other things, has sold women and children into slavery, and which has issued statements on Sharia law saying

that it is permissible to buy, sell, or give as a gift female captives, and slaves because they are merely property. Forced marriages with child brides are frequent as are “temporary” or “tourist” marriages. Palestinians in Gaza have used children as suicide bombers and human shields.

The estimated highest proportion of the population in modern slavery in the Middle East is Qatar, which has considerable numbers of forced labor for construction for the 2022 FIFA World Cup football stadiums and the large infrastructures connected to them. Qatar is followed by Iraq, Yemen, and Syria.

The UNHRC, BDS bigots, and the relentless enemies of the State of Israel will be unhappy to learn of it but the country with lowest proportion, virtual non-existent, of modern slaves is Israel. These bigots need to take account of the proper moral calculus in the Middle East, as well as turn their attention to the horrors of slavery.