

McCarthyism in Israel: Incitement against Israeli Human Rights Organizations Just Got a Lot Scarier

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Global Research, December 17, 2015
[+972](#) 15 December 2015

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Four Israelis who work for leading human rights organizations woke up to a new, frightening reality after a video accused each one of them of being a foreign agent working to defend Palestinian terrorists.

A new video entitled “Foreign Agents – Revealed!” was released on Tuesday by [Im Tirtzu](#), a neo-McCarthyite, extreme right-wing group notorious for its public attacks against left-wing academics and organizations. In 2013 an Israeli court ruled that the group bears [similarities to a fascist movement](#). Its leadership enjoys ties with Likud and Yisrael Beitenu politicians.

The video plasters the faces of the heads of four Israeli human rights organizations — The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel, Breaking the Silence, B’Tselem and Hamoked: The Center for the Defense of the Individual — directly accusing them of being “planted” by different European entities (Holland, Germany, Norway and the European Union, respectively) to aid and abet terrorists. I wonder whether any of these European entities has a problem with being accused of planting operatives in an “enemy” country.

In response to the video, [B’Tselem head Hagai El-Ad](#), who was targeted in the video, told +972:

“The government has no idea what it is doing, so its emissaries are busy dealing in incitement. We will continue to document and expose the occupation and its injustices, and resist Israel’s half century-long military control over millions of Palestinians.”

Meretz MK Michal Rozin has already demanded the attorney general investigate it. According to attorney Michael Sfard, the legal definition of incitement is very narrow, and therefore it probably won’t apply here. It requires a call to commit an offense against someone, the reasonable likelihood that someone can and will commit that act, and that the distributor of the material is interested in that happening or at least doesn’t mind.

However, Sfard says it definitely is incitement in the social, political and ethical sense of the term. “Soviet-style incitement, talking about people as if they are foreign agents working for the enemy.” According to Sfard, there is a legal definition of incitement to racism that does not include the call to harm someone – like what Netanyahu did on [Election Day](#) (even though the Attorney General acquitted him). Such incitement creates an atmosphere of hatred for a person based on their being attributed to a specific group.

“If there was a parallel to the law on incitement for racism that included incitement against political groups, this would qualify,” Sfard told +972.

The past few months have been a scary time for human rights activists in Israel. The recent [incitement against activists from Breaking the Silence](#) — which came from right-wing and centrist leaders alike — has created an environment in which Israelis working for organizations that deal with Palestinian human rights are endangering themselves. They are being silenced, they are the target of slander and lies, and their actual physical safety may be in danger.

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