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Recommended Citation

Galchinsky, M. (2011). Jewish Non-governmental Organizations. In Thomas Cushman (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Human Rights* (pp. 560-569). New York: Routledge.

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Michael Galchinsky

Jewish Non-governmental Organizations

Human rights history and Jewish history have been inextricably intertwined. The history of Jews' persecution as an ethnic and religious minority, especially the Nazis' systematic deprivation of Jews' rights, became a standard reference for postwar activists after 1945 who argued for a global system limiting states' power over their citizens. Many Jewish activists saw a commitment to international human rights as the natural outgrowth of traditional Jewish values. Jews could be especially active in advocating for universal rights protections not only because their suffering conferred moral standing on their cause but also because they could plumb a rich religious and philosophical tradition to find support for a cosmopolitan worldview and because they nurtured generations of experienced organizers.

Jews did not always seek, find, or emphasize the universalism in their tradition. For example, although human rights activists interpreted the phrase "Never Again," associated with the Holocaust, as an imperative to work on behalf of the rights of all people, Zionists often interpreted the phrase as a clarion cry to enable Jews to defend their own rights by building up a Jewish state. Most activists found themselves living in the contact zone among commitments to international human rights, Jewish nationalism, and domestic pluralism.

Jewish human rights activists made significant early contributions to the formation of the new human rights system. In 1945 the American Jewish Committee (AJC), a civil and human rights organization formed in the United States in 1906, led a coalition of civic, labor, and church organizations that succeeded in convincing states' representatives at the San Francisco Conference that human rights should become one of

the central components of the United Nations Charter. Raphael Lemkin, an international lawyer who was also a Polish Jew, coined the term “genocide” and with his lobbying efforts almost single-handedly achieved the UN General Assembly’s adoption of the Genocide Convention in 1948. He received substantial monetary and organizational support in his effort from Jewish nongovernmental organizations. René Cassin, who had been president of the Alliance Israélite Universelle, another Jewish NGO, played a key role in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. For two generations after the Holocaust, Jewish activists contributed to standard-setting, monitoring, advocacy, coalition-building, and establishing and serving on international tribunals to create a global safety net for Jews and other minorities.

Human Rights Activism and Jewish Religious and Political Thought

Jewish human rights activism bears comparison with the activism of other groups, whether defined as ethnic, religious, immigrant, diasporic, or national. Jews have approached the question of human rights through all of these lenses depending on the political and social conditions in their specific contexts. Different groups of Jews have addressed human rights through reference to two continuously evolving bodies of historical texts: their religious tradition and their political thought. They have also understood their human rights work as part of a history of Jewish activism dating to the early nineteenth century.

These traditions do not speak with a single voice on the question of human rights, either individually or together. In all three arenas, Jews have navigated a difficult course between forms of universalism and particularism.

Religious Tradition

Ever since human rights law began to be codified by the League of Nations in the 1920s, and especially since the establishment of the United Nations, Jews have engaged in a spirited debate among themselves over the extent to which the Hebrew Bible, the Mishnah, the Talmud, and subsequent additions to the religious canon have served as foundations for modern rights talk. Claims that Judaism is the source of human rights have sprung from two different inclinations: 1) the desire to justify one's own activism within traditional sources; and 2) the prophetic desire to use the rights endorsed by the tradition as a way to criticize current international, Jewish, or Israeli practices.

The term "human rights" appears nowhere in the Hebrew Bible or in other Jewish sacred texts. The covenant between the Israelites and God assumes that the authority to give and take away all privileges rests with God; whereas, modern political theory assumes that the rights are inalienable entitlements of all human beings. The Mishnah and Talmud, the other core sacred texts in the tradition, do not generally theorize human rights because they are concerned with how to preserve Jews' distinct communal identity in Diaspora rather than to merge Jews with non-Jews into what would to them have seemed a nonsensical political category called humanity.

Nonetheless, Jewish religious universalists have argued that one can "tease out" from the ancient sources certain dispositions—unevenly expressed—toward pluralist tolerance, protection of certain disfavored classes (e.g., widows, orphans, and strangers), and respect for the dignity of the human person. These dispositions can serve as human rights resources in the Jewish tradition (Haas 2005).

Irwin Cotler, formerly a professor of international law at McGill University and head of the Canadian Ministry of Justice, has written that "If human rights has emerged as the new 'secular religion' of our time, then the Jewish religion is at the core of this new secular religion of human rights—the whole symbolized by the normative

exhortation in the Jewish religion of *Tikkun Olam*—the responsibility to ‘repair the world.’” Cotler also cites the Genesis concept of *b’tselem elohim*, that all humans are made “in the image of God,” which he says is “the essence of a religion organized around the inherent dignity of the human person and the equal dignity of all persons” (Cotler 1998). Arik Ascherman, director of Rabbis for Human Rights, an Israeli human rights NGO, has similarly articulated a Jewish liberation theology, asserting that Jews must merge “the Torah of Jewish Law with the Torah of International Law.”

A systematic attempt to merge these two legal systems was made by the former Israeli Supreme Court Justice Haim Cohn who found in the tradition’s ethical commandments the basis for the vast majority of human rights in the UDHR. Writing in 1989 in response to the first Palestinian *intifada*, Cohn sought to lay an intellectual foundation for the burgeoning human rights network in Israel. Although he made no mention of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, he did invoke the biblical injunction not to oppress the stranger in order to criticize his country’s treatment of Israeli Arabs (Cohn 1989). It is no surprise that Justice Cohn helped found the earliest Israeli human rights organization, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.

As this example indicates, a thorough knowledge of selected resources within the tradition has helped Jewish activists, members of the judiciary, rabbis, and policymakers articulate what made their mission distinct within the human rights field, and has attracted other Jews to their cause.

Yet the universalist commandment to “let justice well up like water, righteousness like an unfailing stream” sometimes rubs up against a particularist strain of Jewish religious thought. Proponents of this view—including Rene Cassin himself—emphasize that the Torah and Talmud are exemplified by the Ten Commandments and by Talmudic law. Torah demands duties; it does not confer rights. It outlines what a Jew must do, not

what a human being is entitled to expect. Religious particularists do not necessarily reject human rights, only the contention that such rights are founded on divine authority. Most of the more religiously observant Jewish sects, from modern Orthodoxy to Chabad, have rejected the human rights discourse as a rationalist outgrowth of modernity and Enlightenment rather than a discourse well-grounded in Torah. In its extreme form, however, religious particularism can become exclusive and hierarchical. The religious nationalism of some West Bank settlers, for example, is founded on the biblical promise to Abraham that he and his descendants would possess the territory on the west bank of the Jordan River. Biblical texts demanding that the Israelites tear down the Canaanites' altars could not be the source for the international right to religious freedom. The book of Joshua, in which God commands the Israelites to put thirty-one Canaanite kings, with all their people and possessions, to the sword, could not serve as the source for the Genocide Convention.

As is the case with every ancient theological corpus, Judaism is comprised of sources separated by hundreds or thousands of years. Jewish activists have sometimes had to grapple with the fact that not all of this material can be assimilated to a contemporary human rights perspective. In their encounter with human rights, religious Jews have had to begin by selecting a usable past.

Modern Jewish Political Thought

The tradition of religious thought has exerted a shaping pressure on many, but by no means all, Jewish activists. Most of the Jewish human rights organizations have been of the secular-liberal type, driven less by religious concepts than by the concepts promoted by post-Enlightenment Jewish political thought. At the same time, political

thinkers also exhibit the particularism/universalism dialectic with regard to rights (see Walzer et al 2000).

Post-Enlightenment Jewish thought includes Enlightenment rationalism, emancipationism, political Zionism, internationalism, and cosmopolitanism. In any given instance, Jewish thought is not merely a meditation on timeless problems, but a context-specific response to the thinker's contingent understandings of Jewishness, in all its ethnic, religious, linguistic, national, and diasporic complexity.

In his *Theologico-Political Treatise*, Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677), who was excommunicated from the Amsterdam Jewish community for heresy, began to move political philosophy from its basis in divine law to a human-centered foundation what is “universal or common to all men, for we have deduced it from universal human nature”—specifically from humans' capacity for reason (Spinoza 2005). As a rationalist critic of religious authority, Spinoza has sometimes been seen as a founder of the political thought driving contemporary Jewish human rights work.

Moses Mendelssohn's emancipationist classic, *Jerusalem; or on Religious Power and Judaism* (1789), written during the ferment of the French Revolution, took Jewish political thought a step closer to modern rights advocacy. Mendelssohn undertook to balance the powers of religion and state and to argue for freedom of conscience, religion or belief. Mendelssohn carries forward Spinoza's rationalist project, but did not go as far as Spinoza, arguing that the divine law is merely a particular expression of “the universal religion of mankind” (Mendelssohn 1983). Mendelssohn participated in an increasingly intricate dance between advocating Jews' civil and political rights and maintaining their cultural and religious traditions. He wanted to be able to have his Goethe and eat his Talmud, too.

The rise of modern political Zionism in the late 19th c. should be seen as a reaction against the perceived failure of the emancipation efforts, in addition to being the Jewish version of European nationalism. Theodor Herzl (1860-1904) was convinced that European states could not live up to the promises of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. In *The Jewish State* (1896), he suggested that “Universal brotherhood is not even a beautiful dream” because conflict among peoples is “essential to man’s highest efforts” (Hertzberg 1997). Max Nordau (1849-1923), Herzl’s close associate, told the First Zionist Congress in Basel in 1897 that human rights appealed to logic rather than sentiment, where anti-Semitism still reigned and hence would never be extended to Jews (Hertzberg 1997). Conditioned by ongoing czarist pogroms, Zionists thought it was the moment to for self-preservation, not for worrying too much about the rights of others. Zionist thinkers have been wading through the thicket of relations between ethno-nationalism and pluralist toleration ever since.

If in the modern period particularism often took the form of nationalism, universalism manifested itself most often as internationalism, in both its socialist and liberal varieties. Although Jews played a disproportionate role in the development of socialist theory, they did so largely as workers rather than Jews. Marx set the pattern in his essay “On the Jewish Question” (1843), in which he declared that “the *political* emancipation of the Jew...is the *emancipation of the state* from Judaism” (Ishay 2007); that is, individual Jews deserved their rights as long as they were willing to give up their collective identity. Similarly, Rosa Luxemburg wrote in 1916 that she felt that she had no greater feeling for “Jewish sorrows” than for “the wretched victims of the rubber plantations in Putumayo, or to the Negroes in Africa with whose bodies the Europeans are playing catch-ball.... I have no separate corner in my heart for the [Jewish] ghetto” (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz 1995).

It was in liberal internationalism that European and American Jews made their most lasting mark on human rights thought. As early as the Congress of Berlin (1878), Jewish NGOs were making important contributions to the establishment of human rights principles, not just to protect Jews in Europe, but other minority groups as well (Fink 2004). A common theme was that of American Jewish thinkers like Judah L. Magnes and Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis who associated American ideals of equality and freedom with Jewish ideals (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz 1995). In the 1920s, the Committee of Jewish Delegations asserted at the founding of the League of Nations that the League should establish a body for monitoring abuses of the rights of minorities in the Eastern European countries that had lost World War I. Their idea became codified in the Minorities Treaties (Fink 2004). In 1950, Jacob Blaustein, the president of the American Jewish Committee, wrote that the fortunes of Jews in the Diaspora were “tied to the fate of liberal democracy...under which all citizens, irrespective of creed or race, can live on terms of equality” (Mendes-Flohr and Reinharz 1995).

Newer forms of Jewish political thinking have developed since the 1990s, and they, too, have exhibited a dialectic between the particular and the universal. Globalization has brought Jewish political communities from around the world—in both Israel and the Diaspora—in closer, transnational contact. Global Jewish political communities have expressed cosmopolitan views on some issues—e.g., with regard to genocide in Darfur. On other issues, such as the question of human rights practices in Israel, they have exhibited conflicts over the meaning of citizenship rights in a Zionist state. The belief that Jews in Israel and the Diaspora share, or can share, public policy orientations is implicit in the names of organizations like the Jewish People Public Policy Institute, the World Jewish Congress, the Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations,

and Jewish World Watch. Whether that unity of purpose extends to cosmopolitanism, and whether it exists as ideal or reality, have to be tested case by case.

Formation of Jewish Human Rights NGOs

Ever since Jews were first invited to make the transition from aliens to citizens, the basic condition of Jewish life in liberal democracies has been that participation in the Jewish community is voluntary. Although Jews are bound together by familial, communal, ethnic, religious, and national ties, they are no longer bound by state law to remain Jews. Exit always looms as an option. The fundamentally voluntary nature of Jews' association has profoundly influenced the form of their political behavior. Since the 19th c., Jews have organized their politics through a globally dispersed set of NGOs, none of which represents the whole, and each of which brings its own constituency and mission to the table. This complex, multi-polar structure has had important effects on the development of Jewish human rights activism.

Four different kinds of modern Jewish rights NGOs have emerged. The first group has consisted of those originally established to protect Jews' citizenship rights in their home countries. In time, these NGOs expanded their scope to working on behalf of vulnerable Jews abroad. Since the 1940s, Jews have worked with the United Nations and in regional forums such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. They include: Board of Deputies of British Jews (est. 1815); B'nai B'rith International (est. 1847); Alliance Israelite Universelle (est. 1840); American Jewish Committee (est. 1906); South African Board of Jewish Deputies (est. 1912); and International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists (est. 1969). Each of these organizations gained consultative status in UN human rights bodies, either independently or by integration into one of two international Jewish NGOs, the Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations

(est. 1947) and the Co-ordinating Board of Jewish Organizations (est. 1947). All of these groups were secular-liberal in orientation.

A second group consisted of NGOs that were denominational or interdenominational in character. These included: Agudas Israel World Organization, the political arm of Eastern European Orthodoxy (est. 1912); the International Council of Jewish Women (est. 1923); and the World Jewish Congress (est. 1936). Each of these organizations began as federations of national organizations reacting to crises in world Jewry—Czarist attacks on religious freedoms, the Ukrainian pogroms of 1919 and Nazi anti-Semitism, respectively. Each of these groups gained independent consultative status at the UN. They were sometimes joined by the World Union of Progressive Judaism, the political arm of Reform and Reconstructionist Jews, particularly in their work on behalf of religious freedoms.

In some cases, a state's domestic NGOs were able to contribute to international monitoring and legislation. This third group included, for example, the American Association of Ethiopian Jewry, which played a key role in organizing Operation Solomon, the Israeli airlift of 14,310 Ethiopian Jews in May of 1991. The most important organizations of this type were those that worked on behalf of Soviet Jews' rights to emigration and religious and cultural freedom in the 1970s and 1980s, such as the National Council of Soviet Jewry, and the Union of Councils of Soviet Jews, both based in the United States, or members of various Jewish "refusenik" groups in the USSR. Working with—and sometimes against—the Soviet, American, Israeli, and Dutch governments, these NGOs were instrumental in keeping the public aware of the need to secure the refuseniks' right to emigrate and of Soviet people's need for greater religious freedom and protected cultural rights. Their work with American lawmakers to pass the Jackson-Vanik Amendment to the Trade Act (1974), linking Soviet acquisition of Most

Favored Nation trade status to Jewish emigration levels, had an impact on U.S.–Soviet Cold War relations.

Finally, a fourth group of NGOs consisted of those established in Israel beginning in the mid-1970s. These organizations have, in many cases, adopted international human rights standards to monitor, protest, and publicize violations inside and outside the Green Line, bringing litigation on behalf of victims of abuse and providing caseworker services. In addition, some of them—especially the Association for Civil Rights in Israel and B’Tselem—have formally interacted with international human rights bodies, giving oral and written submissions to treaty bodies: for example, to the Committee Against Torture or the Human Rights Committee.

NGOs in the Israeli group were formed in two waves. The first wave arose in reaction against the occupation in the early 1970s, the Lebanon war of 1982, and the first Palestinian intifada in 1987–1989. These NGOs include: Association for Civil Rights in Israel, B’Tselem, HaMoked: Centre for Defence of the Individual, Rabbis for Human Rights, Physicians for Human Rights (Israel), Public Committee against Torture in Israel, and Israel Coalition against House Demolitions.

A second wave emerged in the wake of the failure of the Oslo peace accords of the late 1990s and the subsequent onset of the second intifada, which occurred in 2000–2005. Machsom (meaning “checkpoint”) Watch was founded in 2001 as a women’s organization monitoring treatment of Palestinians at checkpoints in the West Bank. In 2004 a group of Jews and Arabs formed Ta’ayush (Arabic for “life in common”) as an antiracist organization. Gisha (meaning “access”) focuses on Palestinians’ freedom of movement. Yesh Din (meaning “there is judgment”) works on a broad range of issues in the territories. Israeli human rights NGOs were often joined by peace activists, reservists, and demobilized military personnel.

Jewish NGOs' Broad Approach

Although Jewish NGOs' human rights activism has often focused on protecting vulnerable Jewish communities, it has also extended beyond the boundaries of the Jewish community into the infrastructure of the human rights system. Jewish NGOs also contributed to UN standard-setting (Korey 1988). Many of their submissions in the drafting stages of human rights treaties were summarily incorporated into the treaties—e.g., the World Jewish Congress's submissions of language on the rights to self-determination, asylum, and prevention of discrimination and protection of minorities in the ICCPR. The International Council of Jewish Women played a prominent role among NGOs in the drafting of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The American Jewish Committee's Sydney Liskofsky was the principal drafter of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Religious Tolerance. Morris Abram, a one-time AJC president and ambassador to the U.S. Human Rights Delegation, drafted the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racism and Related Intolerance. Felice Gaer, director of AJC's Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights, was the first woman and first American to sit on the Committee against Torture, she was appointed and became chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, and she was a principal force at the Beijing conference which established that "women's rights are human rights." Jewish NGOs' pervasive concerns have included:

- civilian and refugee protections
- protection of minorities and prevention of discrimination
- religious freedoms
- the rights of women, children, and families
- the prohibition of apartheid

- prohibition, prevention and termination of genocides and mass killing

Jewish NGOs have also worked to ensure that the human rights norms codified in the UDHR, the Covenants, and later treaties could be implemented: they advocated the rights of individual and group petition and made significant contributions to creating the position of high commissioner of human rights. Jews' continued to struggle for the position until 1994 when it was finally established, and they constituted a key activist constituency (along with, among others, Amnesty International and the Carter Center) in working to make the office as effective as possible (Gaer).

Jewish NGOs have often joined coalitions of the larger NGOs to cement alliances, magnify their influence, and wrap their particular Jewish concerns in a more universal framework. AJC's Felice Gaer helped craft an influential joint statement signed by twenty women leaders and activists regarding "Women and the Bosnian Peace Process: Preliminary Questions on Ten Issues of Concern," which was circulated by Secretary of State Madeline Albright and influenced the NATO commander in Sarajevo. The statement argued that rape and other gender-specific crimes must be treated as war crimes by international tribunals. The statement helped guide the preparation of the relative articles of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. The Save Darfur Coalition, the umbrella organization of over 170 NGOs working to stop the genocide in Sudan, bears an even more direct imprint from Jewish NGOs. It was founded by the American Jewish World Service's director, Ruth Messinger, as an outgrowth of her humanitarian aid work in Africa: work explicitly underpinned by Torah-based conceptions of universal social justice. Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel helped oversee the creation of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum's Committee on Conscience, which alerts the administration and the public to genocides in progress.

Internal Dynamics

Jewish NGOs' collaborations were rarely formal or contractual, which enabled them the flexibility to go their own ways when their organization's mission warranted. Jewish NGOs have created a kaleidoscopic range of interrelations among themselves, resembling, by turns, independent action, coordination, competition, and conflict. In their interactions about rights, Jews have produced a system of dynamic relations.

In Israel, there has been extensive, albeit *ad hoc*, coordination among NGOs, specifically on the issues of torture, house demolitions, and freedom of movement restrictions in the occupied territories. NGOs specializing in litigation (for example, ACRI) would take specific cases to the Israel Supreme Court sitting as the High Court of Justice: HaMoked specializes in casework, B'Tselem in monitoring and information-gathering, Physicians for Human Rights in documenting the medical impact of violations, and Rabbis for Human Rights in grassroots actions and education. The most successful collaboration resulted in the Supreme Court's ruling in 1999 that all forms of torture, including "moderate physical pressure," were prohibited. The court's President, Aharon Barak, stated from the bench before his ruling that the human rights NGOs had provided the key documentation on which the ruling was based.

On the other hand, Israeli NGOs have not always agreed on goals, tactics, or legal sources. Some NGOs have refrained from working with peace activists, fearing that the latter's political agenda would compromise their own status as nonpartisan human rights observers. When the delays at Israel's system of checkpoints in the West Bank resulted in a Palestinian woman giving birth in her car, the Association for Civil Rights in Israel argued that the human rights network should work to ameliorate conditions at the checkpoints. The more maverick NGOs, however, protested that the checkpoints

themselves were illegal, and hence the NGOs had to stand for their complete removal rather than amelioration. The disagreement had a constructive effect. Policy makers and the public began to distinguish between “radical” and “mainstream” options, which in turn enabled the “mainstream” group’s amelioration proposals to seem like a compromise. Thus the split among NGOs worked to establish a continuum of possible action that resulted in some movement to prevent future violations.

Productive tensions have also emerged with regard to the proper source of authority to which an NGO should appeal—Israeli law, Jewish law, or international law. Most NGOs have been founded as secular organizations that combine appeals to Israeli and international norms. Some, however, like the Israel Religious Action Center, the political arm of the Reform movement in Israel, have developed an ideology based in a particular interpretation of biblical and Rabbinic sources.

At the global level, too, a fluid coalition politics has reigned. Perhaps the most prominent cases of Jewish internal cooperation and conflict have developed in instances where human rights activists coalesced to protect vulnerable Jewish communities. The most well-known such effort was the movement to gain the right of emigration for Soviet Jews denied exit visas. A largely non-contractual network developed that included Soviet Jewish activists, international and state-based NGOs, the Israeli, Dutch, and US governments, and high-powered individuals. Each of these actors brought its own strengths and mission to the network.

Israel sought to assert control, maintaining that the state was the centerpiece of the global Jewish political process. The Israeli Liaison Bureau, the government agency tasked with working on the Soviet Jewry question, frequently collaborated with the various Diaspora NGOs. The Bureau became concerned that after an initial period in the mid-1960s to mid-1970s in which the Jewish emigration movement was led by Zionists

seeking to go to Israel, Soviet Jews in the 1980s were now opting to go to other places besides Israel (primarily the United States and Germany) by a ratio of 2:1. In keeping with the Zionist ideology of encouraging Jewish exiles to be “ingathered” into the homeland, Israeli governments under Golda Meir, Yitzhak Rabin, and Menachem Begin sought to compel those who opted for other destinations to land first in Tel Aviv, seeking, not the international human right to emigrate, but the right to emigrate to *Israel*.

But many Diaspora Jews believed that Soviet Jews should have “freedom of choice” to immigrate to any state they desired. American and European Jews tended to interpret the case as one of applying a universal right to a particular situation. Diaspora Jews also protested Israel’s attempt to control how information was gathered and distributed. So while the network succeeded in helping to bring 2 million Soviet Jews out of the country, its success could not be credited to its internal cohesion (Lazin 2005).

The existence of both collaboration and conflict among Jewish political actors amounts to an *unsystematic system* which, because of and not in spite of its adversarial qualities, has often worked for Jews’ overall benefit. The fluid structure of Jews’ relations on rights issues provides a *modus operandi* by which bodies with diverse authority structures, missions, and capacities in a multipolar world can find their way to mutual projects.

Reactions to Criticisms of Israel

Although Diaspora activists embraced international human rights during the 1950s and 1960s, their enthusiasm began to cool in the mid-1960s. The primary reason was that many members of the new UN majority—including the Communist bloc, Arab states, and newly independent African and Asian states—began to use the human rights system not just to criticize Israel for particular violations but to ostracize it from the

community of nations. The General Assembly's resolution of 10 Nov. 1975 (A/RES/3379 (XXX)) equated Zionism with racism and initiated decades of condemnations of Israeli rights practices by various UN bodies. The Commission on Human Rights adopted more resolutions condemning Israel than it did for any other state, including states practicing genocide. The General Assembly entertained two resolutions to expel Israel from the organization. Until May of 2000, when it was admitted to the Western European and Others group, Israel was denied access to a UN regional group, which prevented it from being assigned to UN committees. Israel was the subject of two emergency special sessions of the General Assembly, a rarely invoked forum that has not been used in cases of genocide. Until June, 2006, when the ICRC changed its rules, Israel's national emergency medical and disaster aid service, Magen David Adom (meaning "Red Star of David") denied affiliate status. At the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Other Forms of Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa, in August of 2001, the draft Declaration and Programme of Action included numerous mentions of Israel, although by rule no specific country was to be singled out.

Beginning in the 1970s Jewish NGOs began to identify such behavior as a "New Anti-Semitism," designed to turn Israel into a pariah and deny the Jewish people their right to self determination. In some cases, the tension produced by commitments to international human rights and Jewish nationalism caused activists to withdraw their support from the human rights system. More often, NGOs continued their work with various human rights bodies while expending a greater and greater proportion of their resources defending Israel from its critics and pushing for reforms in the UN system. For example, UN Watch, a UN reform organization, was a spin-off of the AJC.

What they perceived as politically motivated allegations of Israeli violations caused many activists to experience ambivalence about international human rights. For example, in the late 1970s, activists in the American Jewish Committee responded to the Zionism=Racism resolution in seemingly contradictory ways. In public, they mounted a substantial public defense of Israel's rights record. Privately, however, the director of AJC's human rights arm, Sidney Liskofsky, discussed with his staff "the Jewish ambivalence re: the Israel-human rights question." The staffers wrung their hands over whether there was any substance to the charges of abuse, and worried that such abuses might cause a negative backlash against Diaspora Jews. On 18 Oct. 1977, Abraham Karlikow, AJC's European director in Paris, sent a letter marked "Confidential" to Liskofsky and other staffers frankly discussing this ambivalence. Recognizing "the special difficulties Israel faces," he nonetheless called for AJC to help build "a human rights-impartial body inside Israel." The result was that for the first time AJC intervened in Israeli human rights politics. It worked confidentially with Haim Cohn and a group of non-governmental Israelis to establish the Association for Civil Rights in Israel. The split between AJC's public and private responses illustrates in stark terms the difficulties of balancing commitments to international human rights and Jewish nationalism.

The difficulties have continued through the present. Although Israel helped draft the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court, the state nonetheless declined to ratify the treaty. The sticking point was a clause criminalizing a state's resettlement of its own civilians in territory it occupies. Israel interpreted this clause as the world community's attempt to restrain the West Bank settlement enterprise. Hence it decided not to join a court designed, among other things, to punish the perpetrators of genocide.

Although Jewish activists resented what they perceived as the political manipulation of the human rights system to excoriate Israel, many continued working for

a fairer and more effective human system. These activists did so because they believed it was better to struggle for human rights than to revert to a world of unquestionable state power; because they carried deep historical memories and had witnessed recent instances of Jewish suffering; because they sought to answer their tradition's call for universal justice; because they hoped to strengthen Israel's democracy; and because they believed that genocide should never be allowed to occur again.

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