

Israel's Refusal to Allow UN Human Rights Investigators to Enter Gaza: The Response of the Mainstream Press

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Media Disinformation](#)

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There is something decidedly wrong when two UN special envoys are denied access to the occupied Gaza strip. In May of this year, Israel refused to allow peace laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu, while on a UN fact-finding mission, to enter Gaza. Then on December 15, it did the same to Dr. Richard Falk—Professor Emeritus of International Law and Practice at Princeton University and currently Distinguished Visiting Professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara—who sought to enter Gaza in order to perform his role as the UN's special rapporteur on human rights in the Palestinian Territories.

How is the press reacting to these events?

The Canoe News, the Daily Mail, and others have responded by simply repeating the misleading, inflammatory accusation that Falk had "compared Israel to Nazi Germany."

Evidently, none of these publications had asked Falk what his position actually is. In a December 17th interview with Amy Goodman on Democracy Now! Falk responded to that accusation, saying: "I never compared the reality of what is going on in Gaza to the holocaust. What I did say was that the kinds of collective punishment that are being imposed on the entire people of Gaza have a resemblance to the collective punishment that was imposed by the Nazis in Germany, and that if this kind of circumstance is allowed to persist, it could produce a holocaust. I never suggested that what was happening was a holocaust." (To see that this is true one could read his 2007 article, "Slouching Toward a Palestinian Holocaust.")

In a substandard opinion piece published in the Taiwan News on December 13th and then reproduced by the San Francisco Chronicle on December 14th under a new title, "9/11 Conspiracy Theorist Should Leave U.N. Job," former New York Times reporter Joel Brinkley, who is now a visiting professor at Stanford University's School of Journalism, said that Falk was unfit for his UN role because of his position on the 9/11 attacks. He acknowledged that Falk had not endorsed theories holding that 9/11 was an inside job but merely said that they merit further investigation. But Brinkley declared that Falk, by thereby showing that he "believes that the U.S. government is capable of such unspeakable evil," does not have the right "frame of mind for his United Nations job."

A December 15th New York Times article, "U.N. Rights Investigator Expelled by Israel," said: "He [Falk] has compared Israel's treatment of the Palestinians to Nazi atrocities and has called for more serious examination of the conspiracy theories surrounding the Sept. 11

attacks. Pointing to discrepancies between the official version of events and other versions, he recently wrote that ‘only willful ignorance can maintain that the 9/11 narrative should be treated as a closed book.’”

Asked by Amy Goodman on Democracy Now! about this statement, Falk—who has pointed out that that 75% of Gazans are suffering malnutrition and 46% of the children are suffering from acute anemia—replied: “They’ve tried to keep people in [Gaza] who know something about the reality of the occupation, and then try to keep people out, such as myself, who could report, credibly, on what is happening inside. And shifting the argument, then, to my qualifications.”

Meanwhile, Chris Hedges indicated the seriousness of the situation in Gaza: “Israel’s siege of Gaza, largely unseen by the outside world because of Jerusalem’s refusal to allow humanitarian aid workers, reporters and photographers access to Gaza, rivals the most egregious crimes carried out at the height of apartheid by the South African regime.”

South African Archbishop Tutu, in a recent interview with Amy Goodman, agreed: “The suffering is unacceptable, it’s totally unacceptable, it doesn’t promote the security of Israel or any other part of that volatile region.”

Surely the most important question is not Falk’s views about this or that subject but the accuracy of what he—along with Hedges and Tutu and many others—has reported. It is true that he obviously has a deeply humanitarian concern with the blockade of Gaza and the resulting suffering of its people. But that concern amply demonstrates that he does have the right “frame of mind” for his job—reporting on human rights abuses suffered by the Palestinians. Replying to his critics in the press, via Goodman, he said: “My whole life has been devoted to trying to tell the truth about facts that are often unpleasant.... I really have sought, in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict peace and justice for both people, and have always had the view that it was possible, desirable, and necessary, and that’s the basis on which I’ve acted throughout this period as special rapporteur for the UN.”

Should news organizations not focus on the question of whether Falk’s description of what is going on in the Palestinian territories is correct, rather than using ad hominem attacks and innuendo to imply that his statements, being rooted in an improper “frame of mind,” should be ignored?

As Falk concludes, “it shouldn’t be about me, it should be on the one side about reporting on the massive and persisting collective punishment inflicted on the whole of Gazan society with no genuine link to security, and on the other side, about respect for the authority and responsibility of the UN in relation to a people undergoing a humanitarian catastrophe.”

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