



A CRITIQUE OF AP'S 2001 COVERAGE OF PALESTINE, BY THE NGO MONITOR

This report was written by the NGO Monitor, an Israel organization, in response to AP's coverage of Palestinian civil society during the first months of the intifada (2001). The report is also available on the [NGO Monitor's website](#). It is reproduced below as it was published, but with updated urls (web addresses).

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Advocacy Project and Grassroots International

Introduction and Mission Statement of the Advocacy Project

[The Advocacy Project \(AP\)](#), describes itself as "a non-profit organization, based in Washington DC, that was created in 1998 to help advocates who are working on the front lines for social justice, peace and human rights."

Their directors are professionals with experience in international NGOs and governmental organizations. Kevin Murray, for example, worked with Oxfam America before becoming Executive Director of Grassroots International (GRI). Jock Covey served on the Middle East desk in the US State Department and as deputy High Representative in Bosnia with the UN. Lucy Nusseibeh founded and directs MEND (the Middle East Center for Non Violence and Democracy). Since 1998, they have worked directly with over twenty campaigns around the world and developed positive reputations on US campuses and in the not-for-profit sector.

This organization is active in many different areas, but in this analysis, we will restrict the focus to Advocacy Net's activities in what they label their "Palestine under Occupation" section.

In explaining their goals, the leaders of this organization declare; *We try to help our partners use information... by visiting our website, reading our newsletter, or hearing about us from others... the AP website has been designed to serve as a general clearing house for information on the campaigns we work with..*

Their basic criteria for embarking on a partnership include;

- Working in a country that is recovering from war or gross human rights violations
- Working for human rights or social justice
- An organization strongly recommended by a respected NGO, donor or friend of the Advocacy Project
- Advocating an issue of universal significance. We will only support a campaign that has an impact that goes beyond its immediate community, or at least lessons to teach other

advocates in other countries. This is common to all of the campaigns we have supported: trafficking of women, impunity, refugee return in Bosnia, the role of civil society in peace-building etc.

- Campaigns largely bypassed or ignored by aid donors

They also produce an e-mail newsletter, *On the Record (OTR)*, distributed free of charge to thousands of subscribers. Since 1998, fifteen series have been produced in addition to online coverage of several conferences, press releases and brochures.

Introduction and Mission statement of Grassroots International

In 2001, the Advocacy Project formed a partnership with Grassroots International (GRI), <http://www.grassrootsonline.org>, which defines itself as a "Boston-based 501(c)(3) human rights and development organization that channels funds to small community groups around the world that are working for peace and social justice." Since its founding in 1983, Grassroots has disbursed \$20 million to its partner organizations and engaged in what it portrays as "campaigns for positions on equality, development, independence, and self-reliance." Its slogan is "promoting global justice through partnerships with social change organizations."

Its mission statement reads;

Grassroots International promotes global justice through partnerships with social change organizations. We work to advance political, economic and social rights and support development alternatives through grantmaking, education and advocacy. In addition to direct grantmaking, we do advocacy and public education on behalf of our partners.

A closer read of the website reveals that "Grassroots International was born out of a commitment to justice for Palestinians. In the nearly two decades since then, the cause of Palestinian rights remains central to GRI and its supporters." In other words, GRI is first and foremost a partisan political organization, which advocates the Palestinian cause.

The Hidden Political Agenda

NGO Monitor believes that Advocacy Net's coverage of "Palestine under Occupation" and its links with GRI reflect a political agenda and an anti-Israel ideological emphasis. This is reflected [in reports of its activities](#):

Over the past year, the Advocacy Project has profiled civil society in several countries that have either emerged from wars or are still in crisis. They have included Bosnia, Kosovo, Cambodia, and Guatemala. In each country we found community activists who were rising to the challenge and providing essential support for a fearful, damaged population.

Nothing prepared us for what we saw in Palestine

It is startling to read that AP is implying, albeit indirectly, that the Palestinian casualties in the present conflict are more shocking than those of Cambodia. It should go without saying that both

the Israeli and Palestinian sides are suffering immeasurably in the present conflict and an organization of this type, "working on the front lines for social justice, peace and human rights" should not be making comparisons with other conflicts. More importantly, the Advocacy Project, like many other anti-Israeli organizations and governments, has stripped this conflict of its context.

[An article published on AP's web site](#) reveals even more of their political agenda.

But from the first day of this uprising, when Israelis killed four unarmed Palestinian protesters, the Israeli response has been completely disproportionate to whatever threat exists. The strategy of closure - cutting off Palestinian communities - is by definition indiscriminate. It is a vengeful act, aimed at crushing the spirit of the Palestinian people. It is also guaranteed to provoke desperate acts of retaliation.

If there is terrorism, it certainly comes from both sides.

The article goes on to describe "a macabre tour of the Palestinian neighborhood of El-Bireh." In these articles, AP has dismissed or ignored the complex political history of broken negotiations and compressing Israel's moral dilemmas, protecting its citizens against vicious bombings, by describing its policy as predicated on "vengeful acts." While condemning Palestinian suicide bombings, AP makes sure that they are put on the same level as Israel's disciplined military protecting its civilian population.

The AP website goes on to explain how;

The delegation tried to visit all of the Palestinian projects that receive support from Grassroots International

This is clearly a one-sided politically partisan perspective, in which there is no attempt to understand the conflict from the Israeli view. Someone with no background to the conflict would believe that a war was being waged against the Palestinians without cause.

Moreover, the website makes use of references and quotes from known anti-Israel academics, describing 'Bantusian areas', with no attempt to balance these claims or place them in their political and ideological perspective. One example is the article 'Palestinian Civil Society under siege, the [Challenge of Agricultural Development](#)'. A footnote 'explains' why 8% of the Palestinian population is dependent on economic aid;

economic enclavization describes a process of growing economic separation or partition or bifurcation that strikingly parallels its political counterpart, Bantustanization.

NGO Monitor believes such terms are a deliberate distortion made by means of an inappropriate comparison with a clear political objective. Branding Israel as an apartheid state with a racist agenda has acquired increased momentum since certain NGOs attempted, unsuccessfully, to hijack the Durban Conference on racism in 2001. Unfortunately, many NGOs, including Advocacy Net and Grassroots International are continuing the association. It has to be

remembered that before the first Intifada erupted in December 1987, there was free movement from the West Bank and Gaza into Israel. Roadblocks separating Palestinian towns within the West Bank were set up as a means of tracking and hindering suicide bombers. In relative terms, the Palestinian economy was far stronger than it is now. The other side of the perspective is simply absent from the reports.

To the organization's credit, they also sharply criticize the Palestine Authority, in [OTR Palestine, Volume 15, Issue 2](#). (Ironically, in this piece, they quote Edward Said questioning whether NGOs had become a goal in themselves, as opposed to engaging in what their mission statements advocate.) Their 'Palestine' homepage, http://www.grassrootsonline.org/pal_main.html, states;

Community and non-governmental organizations in Palestine face a Herculean task -- to build a civil and democratic society within a population that is on the one hand besieged by an occupier and on the other governed by a regime that is authoritarian and often corrupt.

Surprisingly, however, they do not attribute the humanitarian suffering and the terrorism that has forced Israel to respond in self-defense to this "authoritarian and often corrupt regime." An honest assessment of the causes would mention how this 'authoritarian regime' has promoted the campaign of terrorism; how corruption continues to contribute to the precipitous fall of Palestinian GDP; why Israel has concluded it cannot leave the security of its citizens in the hands of leaders who advocate terrorism. Instead the organizations prefer to talk of 'Bantusization' and an 'unending occupation.' Admittedly, each of these issues is debatable and far from clear-cut. However, a serious organization, with a professional and experienced staff and considerable resources, has a clear obligation to avoid biases in their political analyses.

Funding

NGO Monitor seeks to bring to the attention of funding organizations literature and activities, which reveal a hidden political agenda and which depart from the mission statements of the organizations they support. The major funders of AP include The Ministry of Development Cooperation of the Dutch Government, UNICEF, Amnesty International, The International Coalition of Voluntary Agencies and The Coalition for an International Criminal Court. In addition, the Advocacy Project is sponsored by a number of private funds, including The Catherine T. and John D. MacArthur Foundation and the Arigatou Foundation.

These organizations may be surprised at the political advocacy of their beneficiaries and the extent to which the funders themselves have strayed from their own mission statements by providing this support for tendentious demonization of Israel. The International Coalition of Voluntary Agencies, for example, seeks to;

ensure involved and informed NGO networks and facilitates a real 'policy to implementation' partnership between NGOs and international agencies. ICVA facilitates NGO advocacy in the main international body for humanitarian coordination, the UN Inter-Agency Standing Committee, and UNHCR's Standing and Executive Committees.

ICVA's main objectives are as follows: To act as a catalyst and tool for the accurate, timely, and effective exchange of information

NGO Monitor believes that the information in the "Palestine Under Occupation" section of the Advocacy Project is neither accurate nor in support of humanitarian objectives. Instead, this section is misleading and counterproductive to the ICVA's stated aims.

The Ministry of Development Cooperation of the Dutch Government, UNICEF and Amnesty International also have similar objectives. The Arigatou Foundation describes its purpose "to spread the charity and mercy of our Great Leader, the late Mitsu Miyamoto, all over the world, and to pray for the safe and sound development of children--for those suffering, and for the souls of those who have died." The Arigatou Foundation, which means "thank you" in English, and exists to pursue utopian aims, would no doubt be concerned if it knew that AP and Grassroots International were engaging in political issues beyond their mission statement.

Conclusion

The Advocacy Net and Grassroots International are classic examples of how NGOs, which raise considerable funds from organizations as diverse as UNICEF, Amnesty International, well-meaning governments, private donors, trusts and interest groups, are engaging in ideological and political activities in the name of universal human rights values. Simple usage of phrases such as "Bantustan Areas" creates a discourse far removed from the context of Israeli policy and the real context of terrorism and its causes. This seriously affects the credibility of the organizations. Apart from the provocative and propagandistic references to "apartheid" and "racism", the websites of AP and GRI fail completely to mention the more substantive reasons, which drive successive, democratically elected Israeli governments to craft policy. Instead of focusing on the real humanitarian issues, and working to relieve this suffering, these organizations contribute to the campaign of demonization against Israel.

Where the daily attacks against Israeli civilians and the suicide bombings that have killed or maimed thousands, Jews and Arabs, over the past two years are mentioned, Israel's pre-emptive and defensive measures are categorized as "vengeful acts, inviting retaliation." The issues are far more complex, and if members of these organizations and their sources of funding wish to avoid being dismissed as political and ideological factors, they must ensure that such behavior is halted. This is the only way that the NGO sector itself can become more accountable and truer to its aims.