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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
Sixty-first session
Item 8 of the provisional agenda

**QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE OCCUPIED ARAB
TERRITORIES, INCLUDING PALESTINE**

**Joint written statement* submitted by the Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations
(CBJO), a non-governmental organization in special consultative status and B'nai B'rith,
a non-governmental organization on the Roster**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2005]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

The Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations comes to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights unlike any other non-governmental organization outside the Jewish community.

Other non-governmental organizations come to the Commission to denounce human rights violations in one country or another, and ask the Commission to remedy the violation. For them, the Commission is seen as a recourse.

We come here to denounce not just the problems faced by the Jewish community somewhere else, but right here. The Commission, far from providing a remedy, is a perpetrator. The enemy of the Jewish community is anti-Semitism, and, unfortunately, anti-Semitism is fostered and propagated at the Commission.

When our organization witnessed the founding of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945, we were present to ensure that the new international body protected and advanced the basic human rights of the Jewish people. We sought to prevent another Holocaust from happening again. Indeed, we were elated when the UN recognized as a full member the nascent State of Israel – the fulfillment of the Jewish people's basic human rights of self-determination, religious freedom, and life, liberty and security of person.

The hopes we had placed in this Commission turned into despair, as we realized that Israel was being pilloried year after year like no other country in the world. Outlandish, unbalanced attacks on Israel at the Commission are the norm. The Commission provides a platform for unending speeches and resolutions castigating the State of Israel. The Commission continues to set aside a full agenda item aimed at the condemnation of Israel - the only country to be so treated - under the tendentious title "Question of the Violation of Human Rights in the Occupied Arab Territories, including Palestine." , while the multitude of human rights violations elsewhere in the world, including Darfur, only merit one item between themselves.

The effect, and for many the purpose, of the attacks in the form of endless reports and statements under this agenda item is to delegitimize the very existence of the State of Israel as a Jewish state. Yet, the existence of Israel as a Jewish state is nothing the less than the tangible expression of the right to self-determination of the Jewish people. By its ceaseless attacks, the Commission abets and lends moral cover to attacks against Jews and their institutions worldwide as actual or perceived supporters of the State of Israel.

We are witnessing a vicious perversion of history: at a time when the civilized world pays homage to the victims of the Holocaust, the survivors who took refuge in the new State of Israel are equated with their former tormentors and would-be murderers. Their very survival is portrayed as an organized attempt to eradicate another people.

Only technology prevents the suicide bombers directed against Israel's civilian population from killing even more victims. Suicidal killers as well as those who organize their deaths would willingly detonate far deadlier weapons rather than a few sticks of dynamite, if only they had the means.

The worldwide upsurge in anti-Semitism not seen since the Holocaust is directly connected to anti-Zionism. In no other international forum is anti-Zionism vented with such furor as is right here, in the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

Make no mistake about it. The ceaseless and disproportionate anti-Israel rhetoric at this Commission is not mere criticism about the behavior of the democratically-elected Government of Israel. It is directed against Israel's very existence. This is evidenced by the extreme rhetoric and vitriol contained in the annual reports of the Special Rapporteur on Situation of Human Rights in the Palestinian Territories Occupied by Israel Since 1967. Not only are these reports one-sided, they seek to erode Israel's right and duty of self-defense in favour of the human rights of those who actively seek to murder Israel's citizens and their supporters. Thus, the basic rights of Israel's citizens to life, liberty and security of person are undermined.

At the United Nations every effort by Israel to defend itself has become illegitimate. Three years ago, the focus of UN criticism was the Israeli reoccupation of Jenin - the source, the planning centre of many of the suicide bombings that have plagued Israel. The UN relied on spurious accounts to quickly condemn Israel for "a massacre," which later evidence conclusively refuted. But, the damage was done. Two years ago the UN General Assembly decided to target the Israeli security barrier in the West Bank, leading to an Advisory Opinion by the International Court of Justice this past year that sought to condemn Israel for acting against suicide bombers. While doing so, the Court attempted to change the nature of Advisory Opinions, erode states' rights of self-defense and ability to act against terror groups, and deny Israel's citizens their basic human right to life and security. Last year the Commission's own spotlight was on the Israeli killing of Sheik Yassin, founder and leader of the terrorist organization Hamas. The Commission did not mention once the extreme anti-Jewish rhetoric advanced by Sheikh Yassin himself, nor the hundreds of Israelis murdered by Hamas.

Every year, the centre of United Nations attention is Israel. Why, we ask, was there a special session of the Commission to condemn the killing of Sheik Yassin, but no special session to condemn the crimes committed in Rwanda and Darfur? Why has the Commission never voted for a special session on the terrorism of Hamas directed against Israel? Why has there not been a special session of the Commission to condemn the direct targeting of innocent children in Beslan, not to speak of the terror attack on the World Trade Center that killed thousands? The answer to these questions lies in the politics and composition of this commission, to which countries are elected regardless of their human rights record.

We ask those states that are concerned with the effective functioning of human rights mechanisms at the United Nations to stand up to this anti-Israeli bullying. Ultimately, it is not just the Jewish people who suffer from the UN obsession with Israel. It is the whole UN human rights system. Not only does this obsession establish a precedent that can be applied to any other State or people throughout the world. The UN's focus on Israel also eats up precious resources that the international community should devote to advancing the full spectrum of human rights issues around the world.

It is not enough merely to abstain on anti-Israel resolutions, to call for peace in the Middle East, to be absent from voting, or to make "balanced" statements criticizing both sides. Only when States concerned about human rights are prepared not to tolerate the incessant harping on Israel, to say "Stop picking on Israel", will the UN human rights system be able to salvage its credibility. It is not just the Jewish people and the State of Israel, but the whole global rights-seeking community that stands to benefit.
