

The Case Against Israel Rests on Lies

Among them is a quote of mine that South Africa grossly distorted in its presentation to the ICJ.

By Isaac Herzog

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In these dark days for Israel and the civilized world, there are many things that keep me up at night. One is that the international legal system has begun to ignore reality and truth. Justice is unrecognizable, and noble ideals are perverted by terrorists and cynics.

These feelings were brought in focus as the International Court of Justice at The Hague in January considered South Africa's accusation that Israel was guilty of genocide. This absurd claim and the abuse of an august international forum convened to weigh its merits remind us how far we've come from the moral clarity of the fight against Nazism (after which the ICJ was established).

Amid the many demonstrable misrepresentations that emerged from the accusation against Israel, one caught my attention—a quote attributed to me. The quote was taken from a news conference I held on Oct. 12, five days after Hamas terrorists butchered 1,200 people in southern Israel and kidnapped hundreds more. The quote, which included a line that there was “an entire nation out there that is responsible,” referring to the Palestinians, was presented as if it justified the killing of civilians. South Africa used the misconstrued quote at The Hague in an attempt to prove Israel's intent to commit genocide and thus invoke the jurisdiction of the court.

At that Oct. 12 news conference, I was meeting international journalists at the president's residence in Jerusalem. Not one journalist asked me about the pain in Israel or about the global implications of this act of catastrophic terror. They were instead preoccupied with the effect this would have on Palestinians in Gaza—the territory that had produced and then celebrated the perpetrators of the attack.

The fact is that many Palestinian civilians entered Israel on Oct. 7 on the heels of the Hamas terrorists and participated in murder, rape and looting, much of it documented on film. Palestinians were filmed cheering the massacre and jeering and attacking the hostages as they were led into captivity. I also pointed out that Hamas operates from within the heart of its civilian population and enjoys broad support. I then stated, in no uncertain terms, that there are many innocent Palestinians, and that the state of Israel and our security forces don't view

innocent civilians as targets in any way. I made it clear that Israel acts in keeping with international law.

These words were purposely distorted when presented to the court. The claim that Israel is committing genocide can't rest on accurate information, because it is a lie. Israel is acting to protect its citizens from an explicitly genocidal enemy, as we are required to do under international law. Israel is doing so with utmost concern for civilian life, as experts from other Western militaries know well. The civilian casualties in Gaza are a tragedy—due to Hamas's decision to attack Israelis and the way Hamas fights from under and behind its own civilians.

Differentiating civilians from combatants isn't only a basic part of my own worldview and Israel's basic values; it is essential to the values of humanity. We are at war with Hamas, not with the civilians of Gaza. I reject and condemn any call for their harm. Humanitarian aid must reach them, as it is already reaching them, even though more than 130 of our people remain hostages in the hands of Hamas, a fact that hasn't been sufficiently appreciated as an international priority. I understand that many in Israel feel that by allowing aid we are helping the people abusing our kidnapped citizens and giving up a pressure point that could hasten their release and shorten the war.

The world can't disregard what we saw on Oct. 7. The International Court of Justice has ignored most of these crimes, but we in Israel can't. The free world must not forget that the crimes against humanity in this war were perpetrated, and continue to be perpetrated, by Hamas and its allies in Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen and Iran.

The South African case, brought in support of Hamas, is a blood libel against the nation-state of the Jewish people—a shameful low for an international system that emerged from the ashes of the Holocaust. This abandonment of moral clarity, the desertion of the vision of international justice and its replacement by cynical politics and outright falsehoods, will have repercussions far beyond Israel.

Mr. Herzog is president of Israel.

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