

Donor Beware: Why I Question World Vision's Work in Israel

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This week, a district court in southern Israel announced a guilty verdict against World Vision defendant Mohammed el-Halabi, ending a six-year trial. El-Halabi was found guilty, and sentenced to 12 years in prison.

Call me old fashioned, but I am not a fan of terrorism in general. Specifically, when it's directed at me, my family, my people and my country. I am even less of a fan of terrorism when it's supported by ministries that embolden those who delegitimize and threaten Israel as this case demonstrates. I have been following this case since its inception because it hits close to home on many levels.

I immigrated to Israel in 2004 as an orthodox Jew, and have spent more than 30 years in non-profit work, most of which has been spent building bridges and educating Christians on Arab-Israeli issues.

World Vision (WV) is one of the largest Christian NGO-ministries with global influence and impact. Unfortunately, as big as World Vision is, so too is its anti-Israel bias under the guise of humanitarian aid. There are many examples, including these documented by non-profit watchdog, NGO Monitor.

Among these, NGO Monitor accuses WV of exploiting the suffering of Palestinian Arab children in order to launch political attacks against Israel:

"World Vision promotes a very distorted narrative of the Arab-Israeli conflict. After the 2014 Gaza War, World Vision published that they termed first-person accounts of children

in Gaza, which cannot be verified and depict Israel as the sole aggressor and erasing the context of Hamas terrorism. World Vision failed to publish any findings on the effects of the war on Israeli children.”

World Vision’s bias is long established, and discredits its purportedly good intentions, poisoning the wells of any actual good work they may actually do. WV defendant el-Halabi is a senior Palestinian Arab employee who, with little oversight or a series of winks, siphoned off significant funds to support Hamas’ network of terror in Gaza.

Sadly, poor oversight happens in nonprofits of all background, with money being expropriated sometimes inappropriately and often illegally, for purposes other than what the organization claims and other than what the donors’ intent is.

I have worked and volunteered for such organizations, and know about many more. It is one of the things that led me to establish the Genesis 123 Foundation in order to no longer work in an environment where I could not justify misuse of funds as I build bridges among Christians. I have also seen how good Christians are taken advantage of by organizations making claims for which they have no standing, or with wholesale deceit. I have written and spoken about this as the objectification of Christians as a faith-based ATM.

There seems to be abundant connections between WV biases linked to the inconvenient realization of vast amounts of money being used for funding Hamas’ terror infrastructure. I don’t want to judge whether WV knowingly allowed el-Halabi to divert the funds. As a ministry with a huge global presence, raising money among Christians worldwide, World Vision should never have even a hint of speculation of financial impropriety. Not like this. That is concerning.

Maybe, however, they didn’t think there was anything inappropriate. While WV came out with a statement opposing

terrorism, more concerning in this case is that it seems that even with their employee caught with his hand in the terrorist jar, World Vision continues to believe in, and advocate for, his innocence. With proof that funds were diverted to support terror, WV's continued support of their guy is at best misplaced naivete, and at worse, outright collaboration.

Rather than seeking to fix problems that maybe were unintended, but certainly for which they are culpable nonetheless, WV seems to be doubling down on a narrative of innocence in the face of hard evidence. As reported, "Though the court said that it knew World Vision believes Halabi to be innocent, it said that it was more likely that the organization did not want to overdo oversight of its finances, lest it harms its working relations with Gazan groups." In other words, WV supports aiding and abetting terrorists.

Generally, I try to live with the highest level of personal and professional integrity. As a seasoned non-profit professional, I am deeply troubled and astounded by what seems to be a lack of responsibility and humility from WV. As an Israeli, I am deeply troubled that WV seems to be supporting terrorists who use Palestinian Arab women and children as human shields in the guise of humanitarian work to support these people, as they fire rockets to harm Israelis.

It has compelled me to call upon my Christian friends specifically, to be particularly diligent about who they are funding and where their money is actually going. I have a vision to help Christians understand this from an Israeli perspective which is so desperately needed when there is even a hint of a wide abuse of trust and misappropriation of funds, and so they are not taken advantage of. WV is making my case loudly and clearly. I can't fix fraud or poor oversight among others, but I do aspire to raise the bar and at least help good Christians with a heart for Israel, and Palestinian Arabs. That they give intelligently, in ways that make a true and meaningful impact, among Arabs and Jews in this complex

region.

We are expected to love our neighbor. One does not have to be anti-Israel to support Palestinian Arabs. WV has chosen to adopt this modus operandi.

As this case is unavoidably political, with WV demonstrating a gross anti-Israel bias, there's an important sociological note: the defendant's name indicates his family's Syrian origin. It is possible they were among the throngs of Arabs from around the Middle East who migrated to Israel when the Jewish people began to return en masse, and made the land prosper as prophesied. I do not dispute that there are millions of Arabs who refer to themselves as "Palestinian" today, even if their origins are elsewhere. But when organizations like WV actively choose to delegitimize Israel by funding terrorists, and then justifying that, while Israel is accused of alleged suffering of the Palestinian Arabs. Fairness and accuracy beg the clarification that many of today's "Palestinians" only arrived 100 years ago seeking prosperity, and then making war against the people through whom God said the land would prosper.

Jonathan Feldstein was born and educated in the U.S. and immigrated to Israel in 2004. Throughout his life and career, he has been blessed by the calling to fellowship with Christian supporters of Israel and shares experiences of living as an Orthodox Jew in Israel. He is president of the Genesis 123 Foundation, which builds bridges between Jews and Christians.