



Kuwait: Serial Violator of Human Rights

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: There is considerable hypocrisy in the fact that Kuwait, which in 1991 expelled approximately 400,000 Palestinians who worked and lived in its territory for decades (following the PLO's enthusiastic support for the occupation of the emirate by Saddam Hussein), and even murdered thousands of others, is spearheading a diplomatic struggle in the Security Council that purports to protect Gazans following the violent riots along the border fence in the Gaza Strip.

Following the recent riots along the Israel-Gaza border, Kuwait has embarked on a campaign of remarkably hypocritical political activism with regard to the Palestinians. At the head of this campaign is parliament speaker Marzouq al-Ghanim. His name first appeared in Israeli headlines in October 2017, when he shouted at members of the Israeli parliamentary delegation at a meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in St. Petersburg, "Get out of the hall ... You child murderers."

Though this was not Ghanim's first provocation towards Israel (just over a year ago, for example, he called on the Arab Parliaments Association to mobilize and work together for the removal of Israel's membership from the Inter-Parliamentary Union), the St. Petersburg outburst made him a hero in the eyes of Palestinians. About two months ago, a street in the West Bank town of Salfit was named after him as a sign of appreciation and recognition.

Why does Ghanim act against Israel so vigorously? Because though he is a multi-billionaire owning dozens of international businesses, he has everything short of popularity. As he is not popular in his country – two MPs recently lodged a complaint with the Inter-Parliamentary Union on the grounds that he has exceeded his authority and mismanaged the parliament he heads – Ghanim seeks approval on "the Arab street" at Israel's expense.

It goes without saying that Kuwait in general, and Ghanim in particular, are hardly role models for democracy and the protection of human rights. In addition to the ethnic

cleansing of the Palestinians described above, the scope of which nears that of the 1948 "Nakba," it is worth remembering that in recent years Ghanim abolished a law that granted citizenship and rights to tens of thousands of "Bidun" ("without" in Arabic) – members of a 100,000-strong community of stateless people who cannot get a passport, are not eligible for state health care, cannot attend regular schools, cannot marry, and cannot be buried. They are the modern slaves of the Persian Gulf. Their plight is ignored by Western states, though many human rights organizations are aware of the problem.

It has been argued that Kuwait bribes activists to keep silent about the Bidun problem. Indeed, the Kuwaiti establishment treats the Bidun as illegitimate aliens, though they were the original inhabitants of the area prior to the establishment of the emirate. In recent years, ideas have been raised about granting them citizenship, and there has even been talk of bribing the Sudanese authorities to grant them Sudanese passports. These steps have failed.

Ghanim, who has played a central role in the discrimination against and oppression of the Bidun, does not hesitate to dabble in the Palestinian issue while continuing to abuse various groups of his own people, primarily women. He has acted to further narrow women's rights, which are already limited in the emirate (for example by preventing them from enlisting in the Kuwaiti army).

Western countries, and especially Israel, should put the suffering of the Bidun on the agenda with a view to finding an appropriate solution. A country like Kuwait, which pretends to be a leading human rights player in the Middle East, continues to violate basic human rights with impunity, notably by holding tens of thousands of people under conditions of slavery. The Western nations and international organizations responsible for the protection of human rights must take action to eradicate this much more disgraceful phenomenon than the Gaza "humanitarian crisis."

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