

# An Open Letter To The President Of ABC News

January 20, 1988

Mr. Roone Arledge  
President, ABC News  
7 West 66th Street  
New York, N.Y. 10023

Dear Mr. Arledge:

Rarely have our offices been so besieged with phone calls as they were on Tuesday, January 19, following an ABC Evening News story the night before comparing Israel with South Africa.

We share the sense of outrage voiced by our constituents. Israel is one of the great democracies of the world, this despite the fact that it has never experienced a day of total peace. Moreover, it maintains its democratic values in an area of the world where democratic politics are nowhere to be seen. It is this democracy that is being compared to the racist state of South Africa.

How could you justify making such a comparison? Peter Jennings, in his introductory comments, sought to do so by saying that despite Israel's rejection of the validity of such a comparison, "The Israelis and the South African governments do have one thing undeniably in common, they both rule over large populations which have inferior status..."

To use this as a basis for the newscast is

about as meaningful as it would be to identify the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. as common democracies because each has a constitution which speaks to democratic values. What is omitted is so much more important than what is said. The Soviets do have a high-sounding constitution, but it bears no relationship whatsoever to the realities of Soviet life.

Yes, Israel does have the responsibility of administering the West Bank and Gaza with its Palestinian population. But to ignore, as ABC does, the circumstances of Israel's presence in the territories, why Israel law has not been applied to the areas, and why there is no resolution of the problem -- all factors which make Israel's situation radically different from that of South Africa -- is to do a great injustice to truth.

Israel is in the situation of governing Palestinians in the territories for completely different reasons than South Africa's control over the Blacks. Israel is there because of a war forced on it by Arabs in 1967, the third such war since 1948. After the war, in which Israel won the West Bank and Gaza, Israel resolved that this time, unlike the past, it would only make concessions or withdrawals when the Arabs do the civilized thing they had long refused to do -- negotiate peace.

South Africa, on the other hand, controls its Black population because of the racist

philosophy of the state.

Secondly, the Palestinians in the territories have a different legal status than the citizens of Israel itself -- Jews and Arabs -- for a very different reason than the gaps that exist between the races in South Africa. When Israel won the territories in 1967, it could have applied Israeli law and given the residents full citizenship. But had it done so, the world would have condemned Israel for annexing the area. Instead, it decided to leave the areas under the laws that existed prior to 1967 -- Jordanian law on the West Bank and British regulations in Gaza. These did not provide the full democratic privileges granted to citizens of Israel, but it was the fairest solution until the Arabs would be willing to sit and negotiate.

The South African Blacks on the other hand have a permanent status of inferiority as codified in South African laws and as reflecting the philosophy of the white rulers. There are no holding patterns here but a rigid racist ethos.

Finally, the Palestinians in the territories have always had the opportunity to resolve their problem by coming to negotiate with Israel. The fact that they haven't reflects the overriding interests of the PLO, not in changing the daily situation for the better, but in continuing the war against Israel at the expense of the residents.

The Blacks of South Africa, on the other hand, have never been offered the opportunity to end the system of Apartheid. Had such an offer been made, the Blacks, unlike the Palestinians, would surely have grabbed it because their purposes

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