

U.S. mainstream media downplays Amnesty International's finding that Israel is committing genocide



New York, December 8 (RHC)-- The mainstream U.S. media faced an excruciating dilemma. Amnesty International, the respected human rights organization, just released a 296-page report, based on months of research, that said Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.

How much would American newspapers and cable news networks downplay or try to neutralize the report? The preliminary results are already clear. The media could not entirely ignore the news; after all, Amnesty has been around since 1961, and the organization won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1977.

But the New York Times, CNN, and the rest partly concealed Amnesty's genocide finding to an astonishing extent. There was one shining exception, Chris Hayes of MSNBC, who covered the news with an 8-minute segment, and which included an in-person interview with Amnesty's U.S. director.

Let's start with the New York Times, which to a great extent sets the tone for the rest of the mainstream. The Times buried the story on page 8, and ran only 20 paragraphs, nearly half of which were devoted to Israel's denial of the genocide allegation. A day later, the story was already off the paper's online home page. In general, the paper has no problem citing Amnesty's findings; over the past year it quoted the organization about human rights violations in Iran, Nigeria, and Bangladesh.

The Times report also left out one obvious expert source: Omer Bartov, the distinguished Israeli-born professor at Brown University who is arguably the world's leading authority on genocide. Bartov, who has written 10 books on the subject, did appear in the Times at the end of 2023, when he concluded that Israel's actions in Gaza did not — yet — constitute genocide. He changed his mind earlier this year, based on more evidence, but the paper seems to have lost his phone number and email address.

National Public Radio was even more pathetic. NPR does have a reporter in Tel Aviv, Michele Keleman, but it only put her on the air briefly, and her short, 500-word report gave nearly as much time to Israel's denials. CNN was curious. The network's website has a long (29 paragraph) written report by Nada Bashir, which does include the kinds of detail about Amnesty's genocide finding that is missing in the other outlets. But the report, at least so far, never went on the air, so people who watch CNN instead of visiting its website remain in the dark. A video report by Bashir did appear on CNN's social media channels.

The Washington Post was somewhat better. The paper ran an Associated Press report that outdid the other outlets; the AP said, for example, that Amnesty found that Israel was inflicting on the Gazan people "a slow, calculated death," the kind of strong language missing in the New York Times and on NPR. And then the Post also published an explainer by its own reporters, which would have given its audience at least some idea of the scope and importance of the Amnesty finding.

But "All In with Chris Hayes," on MSNBC, ran a long report on December 5 that showed how Amnesty's genocide finding could have been covered. Hayes started by briefly outlining Amnesty's history, explaining that it is the world's largest human rights organization, with some 7 million members globally. He then introduced his guest, Amnesty's U.S. Executive Director Paul O'Brien, who calmly explained that Amnesty's report was not done overnight. O'Brien said that Amnesty researched for many months, including 200 interviews, and more than 200 statements from Israeli officials.

Hayes did his job as a journalist. He politely but firmly raised questions about the genocide finding. Under international law, genocide requires "intent" on the part of those committing it. Documenting war crimes "alone" is not enough. O'Brien responded well, and anyone watching would have gotten a broader view of the issue.

How much of a backlash will Chris Hayes face from the pro-Israel forces for running this report? Or will Israel's defenders decide to ignore it, and hope it sinks quickly from view? We shall see.

[SOURCE: PRESS TV]

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