

September 19, 1975

Report on the annual Amnesty Council

1. The annual Amnesty International Council was held in St. Gallen from September 11 to 14. Since this is the first time I have attended an Amnesty conference, and closely observed the character and structure of the organization, I will begin with several general details.
2. Amnesty was founded in 1961, by a handful of single issue fanatics in London (in fact, it could be said that the organization grew out of an article published in The Observer, by its spiritual leader – Peter Benenson – who has completely withdrawn from activism since). The organization now has between 40,000 and 50,000 members (the exact number is unclear) in 32 sections, exactly half of them (16) in Europe. The organizational structure is such that the size of the section is not necessarily determined by the number of members, but also by the number of “adoption groups” working on behalf of “prisoners of conscience”. All told, there are 1582 such groups, 1382 of them in Europe. The largest section, in terms of members, is in the Netherlands, where word is, there are almost 17,000 members, or about a third of the overall membership of Amnesty worldwide. However, the largest section in terms of “adoption groups” is in Germany, where there are more than 500 groups. The most organized (and perhaps strongest) section is in Sweden. To compare, it is worth noting that the Israeli section has less than 15 members and only two “adoption groups”.
3. Though Amnesty was founded as an organization that works for “prisoners of conscience” only, in recent years, it has expanded its activity to campaigns against (a) capital punishment; (b) torture and (c) – for improvement in prison conditions. There is no doubt that with time, activity will be extended to cover the entire gamut of human rights.
4. The international organization of Amnesty (as distinct from the national sections) has (a) a small executive committee with nine members, which convenes relatively frequently. It is headed by a German (who is not known as sympathetic to Israel) by the name of Dirk Börner. (b) An annual council, to which this report refers. Börner served as chair of the St. Gallen Council. (c) Until this year, a general assembly of all Amnesty members was held every five years. Such an assembly was warranted only so long as the organization was relatively small. This year, owing to the organization’s exponential growth, the assembly was canceled. (d) A secretariat, located in London, which today employs no less than 66 full time staff members. The secretary general is Martin Ennals.
5. The annual Amnesty Council is attended by voting delegates and observers. There were close to 200 in St. Gallen, but only 58 of them could vote: the nine executive committee members and 49 section delegates. The number of delegates each section gets depends on its size (doubly calculated as noted above). The section with the most votes is the German section (6 votes), followed by Sweden (5), several sections that have four (the Netherlands, Britain, the USA), etc. Israel has only one vote, and it too was given to us only this year, after we formed a second “adoption group”, which meant we met the minimum requirement

(we are below the minimum requirement in number of members). Truthfully, the vast majority of the sections, including large countries such as Italy have only one vote. Two of us from the Israeli section attended the St. Gallen Council: other than myself (as a delegate), Dr. Nitza Libai attended also (as an observer).

6. Amnesty is, in essence, a Western European organization, but the aspiration is to expand. There are no Amnesty sections in Arab countries, but a unanimous resolution was passed to consider the initiation and establishment of sections in the Middle East and Africa this year as pressing. Therefore, we will, presumably, come across Arabs in the coming years.
7. Amnesty members are usually left leaning, but, it cannot be said, based on what I have seen in St. Gallen, that this is a radical left wing organization. The organization certainly enjoys exceptional popularity and prestige in Western Europe, and the rate of growth in the German, Dutch and Scandinavian sections is truly staggering. The Norwegian delegate, for instance, said that since the country's section would soon become the largest human rights organization in Norway, the Norwegian government was planning to officially endow the section with large sums of money. Mainly for this reason – and the uncertainty on how to distinguish between “good” governments and “bad” ones – an anticipated resolution forbidding Amnesty sections to receive government aid has not been passed (yet).
8. From the Israeli perspective, it seems to me that Amnesty is a very important forum, particularly in terms of our relations with Western Europe. Although the executive and the secretariat do occasionally show some hostility toward Israel, as do some key figures in several countries, one cannot decry the entire organization. I certainly came across several Israel supporters (for instance, a union man from Sweden, Iver Asp, who has visited Israel twice and maintains close contacts with Labor party officials). I have no doubt that through activity within the organization, we would be able to improve our status there, and make it difficult for the executive and the secretariat to do as they please.
9. It is worth noting, that Israel was never mentioned in the discussions at St. Gallen, even though resolutions were passed with respect to death sentences issued in Spain and to refugees in Argentina, and several countries were condemned by name, including Chile and South Africa. However, in the annual report submitted to the Council, which describes issues in no less than 107 countries, pages 130-131 contain several unpleasant paragraphs about Israel. The report also obviously addresses the investigation of Israeli and Syrian war prisoners. I took the opportunity of a long conversation with Börner to ask directly why Amnesty had not published the positive report compiled by John Mortimer regarding the midwife's trial in Haifa (Ennals himself told me about the report in London. I could discern its content from my meeting with Mortimer in Israel). Börner's reply was that (a) Amnesty does not publish positive reports, only negative ones! When I expressed surprise, and doubt, he presented as evidence the non-publication of a report that was favorable to Germany on the Baader-Meinhof trial. (b) The midwife's trial had not yet ended, and therefore, Mortimer should return to Israel and complete his report.
10. During the St. Gallen Council, I was contacted via telephone by the Consul General in Zurich, who told me Israel's official response to Amnesty's report on prisoners of war was finally provided to Amnesty via the embassy in London. I immediately made inquiries with Börner and Ennals, and it turned out this was the first they had heard of the response and that they had not received it yet. In other words, either the response was given in London, when all the top secretariat personnel were in St. Gallen, or the

transmission had been delayed. I had already had doubts as to whether we should bring up the issue of the Middle East in St. Gallen in the first place. Many would have taken the opportunity to attack us (based on the aforesaid annual report, or generally), such that we would only have attracted trouble. Since the Israeli response had yet to reach its destination, there was certainly no room for me (as a non-governmental delegate) to report about it. The sharp conversation I had with all members of the executive in London was sufficient. However, I do recommend that Israeli embassies distribute a copy of the response to all Amnesty sections worldwide.

11. The discussions in St. Gallen were rather disappointing in terms of content. First, almost all of them revolved around financial, technical, administrative and tactical questions. There was no serious discussion of policy issues or outlines for action. Second, there was no real simultaneous interpretation (there was interpretation from English, mostly into French, for those requiring it, but not the other way), such that all speakers had to speak English, and for many this was an impossible task. The level of discussion was low. Generally speaking, this is not an intellectual organization and activism in it apparently provides ordinary people with an outlet for the passion for activism and the desire to save the world. It was evident that there was a huge gap between professionals (for some of whom, such as section directors, this is a living) and all sorts of clueless bores.
12. Discussions in St. Gallen were divided into a plenum and four working groups that discussed (a) structure; (b) development; (c) methodologies and (c) finance. Since there were only two Israelis, we participated only in working groups (a) and (c) and did not attend the other two. We never spoke in the plenum, but we were active in the working groups. I played a key role in the discussion around a fundamental report dealing with Amnesty's entire activity structure which was submitted under the auspices of the executive and the secretariat. I obstructed many sections, caused changes in others and passed a resolution that establishes a policy committee (designed to take some of the excessive powers of the executive). The chair of my working group was the Swede, Asp, and he accepted most of my ideas and fought for them. It is hard to say that this exercise made me popular among the executive and the secretariat, but at least it made my presence well felt. Börner (who demonstratively asked me to sit at the table with him at the gala dinner) has already asked if I was interested in joining the executive in future. To his great satisfaction, my response was negative, but I do get the impression that if we did take it as an important mission, we could reach the executive after two-three years of activity.
13. Of the specific questions discussed, I would like to highlight just several points:
 - a. The question of whether Amnesty should advocate for "prisoners of conscience" who support violence in theory (although have not used violence themselves) came up, as it did in previous years. At the moment, Amnesty's constitution forbids it to advocate for any prisoner who has used or supports violence. Every year, left wing activists try to have the constitution amended. In St. Gallen, the executive was tasked with submitting propositions on this issue at the next Council, which buys us a year, but I have no doubt that sooner or later, the existing formula will change.
 - b. There is tremendous pressure to move the organization's core out of London. The center of gravity has long since shifted from the British section to the Continent (this year, for the first time in Amnesty's history, the executive had no British members), and there is no small amount of dissatisfaction in the sections with the way the secretariat runs things from London, far from the large

sections. One of the speakers said the annual report submitted to the Council was an expression of a cult of personality for Martin Ennals, and that his name was mentioned in the report no fewer than 92 times. The premise is that moving the secretariat to the continent would bring it closer to the main sections, and under their influence. In addition, the Amnesty office in London is housed in a building that cannot accommodate its huge growth, and the secretariat needs to move either way. The concrete suggestions are Luxemburg or Rotterdam, though Geneva was mentioned as well. I see no disaster in the first two, but the spirit prevalent among the many international organizations concentrated in Geneva would be unfavorable to Israel. Two votes were held on this subject. A proposition to amend the constitution by omitting the express reference to London failed on a single vote that was missing for two-thirds (I could say it was my vote, as I voted against...). A compromise was, however, accepted, which would allow leaving London according to an executive decision with accession from most sections. This would give everyone the opportunity to make inquiries into this issue based on a concrete proposal.

- c. The London secretariat's budget reached 366,000 GBP in the 1975/76 fiscal year. The budget proposed for next year exceeded half a million British pounds. Ultimately (following dissent from one of the larger sections, which carry most of the financial burden), it was lowered to 460,000 GBP. However, the top bar was left open for negotiation on a voluntary basis. This is quite a large sum for a non-governmental organization, and it is worth remembering that this is the budget for the secretariat only. The larger sections have sizeable funds of their own (the Swedish section alone spends a quarter of a million dollars yearly to help "prisoners of conscience"), and there are special funds for special operations. The budget increase would also increase the levies we pay, from 173 GBP to 265 GBP. I voted against this resolution, but the larger sections ruled the day. Amnesty is planning to institute a worldwide collection appeal in addition to the payments from the sections. The main instigator of this operation is a Swiss Jew by the name of Fritz Scherk (a relative of Beni Navon's). In the meantime, there is debate over the twofold question: (a) how to make sure the appeal does not get money from sources that would be considered illegitimate by the organization, such as the CIA, and (b) how to prevent conflict between the worldwide appeal and local fundraising activity by the large section. It is their problem.
- d. The next Council (instead of the cancelled assembly) will be held in Strasbourg.

[signed]

Prof. Yoram Dinstein