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## Kafka has a rival. Today, the Foreign Office lectures us on human rights

Such an open day beggars belief. At this PR gala you will find no stall for the victims of rapacious British power

**John Pilger**The Guardian, Monday December 1 2008

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Today, a surreal event will take place in London. The Foreign Office is holding an open day "to highlight the importance of human rights in our work as part of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights". There will be various "stalls" and "panel discussions", and foreign secretary David Miliband will present a human rights prize. Is this a spoof? No. The Foreign Office wants to raise our "human rights awareness". Kafka and Heller have many counterfeits.

There will be no stall for the Chagos islanders, the 2,000 British citizens expelled from their Indian Ocean homeland, whom Miliband's government has fought to prevent from returning to what is now a US military base and suspected CIA torture centre. The high court has repeatedly restored this fundamental human right to the islanders, the essence of Magna Carta, describing the Foreign Office actions as "outrageous", "repugnant" and "illegal". Yet Miliband's lawyers refused to give up, and were rescued on October 22 by the political judgments of three law lords.

There will be no stall for the victims of a systemic British policy of exporting arms and military equipment to 10 of Africa's most war-bloodied and impoverished countries. In his speech today, with the good people of Amnesty and Save the Children in attendance, shamefully, what will Miliband say to the sufferers of this UK-sponsored violence? Perhaps he will make mention, as he often does, of the need for "good governance" in faraway places, while his own regime suppresses a Serious Fraud Office investigation into BAE's £43m arms deal with the corrupt tyranny in Saudi Arabia - with which, noted Foreign Office minister Kim Howells in 2007, the British had "shared values".

There will be no stall for those Iraqis whose social, cultural and real lives have been smashed by an unprovoked invasion based on proven lies. Will the foreign secretary apologise for the cluster bombs the British have scattered, still blowing legs off children, and the depleted uranium and other toxic substances that have seen cancer consume swaths of southern Iraq? Will he speak about the universal human right to knowledge, and announce a diversion of a fraction of the billions bailing out the City of London to the restoration of what was one of the finest school systems in the Middle East, obliterated as a consequence of the Anglo-American invasion, along with museums and publishing houses and bookstores, and teachers and historians and anthropologists and surgeons? Will he announce the dispatch of simple painkillers and syringes to hospitals that once had almost everything and now have nothing, in a country where British governments, especially his own, took the lead in blocking humanitarian aid, including Howells' ban on vaccines to protect children from preventable diseases?

There will be no stall for the people of Gaza, of whom, says the International Red Cross,

starvation threatens the majority, mostly children. In pursuing a policy of reducing one and a half million people to a Hobbesian existence, the Israelis have cut most lifelines. David Miliband was in Jerusalem recently, within a short helicopter flight of the captive people of Gaza. He did not go, and said nothing about their human rights, preferring weasel words about a "truce" between tormentor and victims.

There will be no stall for the trade unionists, students, journalists and human rights defenders assassinated in Colombia, a country where the government's "security forces" are trained by the British and Americans and responsible for 90% of torture, says a new study by the British human rights group Justice for Colombia. The Foreign Office says it is "improving the human rights record of the military and combating drug trafficking". The study finds not a shred of evidence to support this. Colombian officers implicated in murder are welcomed to Britain for "seminars".

There will be no stall for history, for our memory. Stored in the great British libraries and record offices, unclassified official files tell the truth about British policy and human rights, from officially condoned atrocities in the concentration camps of colonial Kenya and the arming of the genocidal General Suharto in Indonesia, to the supply of biological weapons to Saddam Hussein in the 1980s. As we hear the moralising drone of ex-British military "security experts" telling us what to think about current events in Mumbai, we might recall Britain's historic role as midwife to violent extremism in modern Islam, from the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the 1950s through the overthrow of Iran's liberal democratic government to MI6's arming of the Afghan mujahideen, the Taliban in waiting. The aim was and remains the denial of nationalism to peoples struggling to be free, especially in the Middle East, where oil, says a secret Foreign Office document from 1947, is "a vital prize for any power interested in world influence and domination". Human rights are almost entirely absent from this official memory, unlike fear of being found out. The secret expulsion of the Chagos islanders, says a 1964 Foreign Office memorandum, "should be timed to attract the least attention and should have some logical cover [so as not to] arouse suspicions as to their purpose".

How is this wonderland perpetuated? The media play their historic role, censoring by omission. Roland Challis, who was the BBC's south-east Asia correspondent when Suharto was slaughtering hundreds of thousands of alleged communists in the 1960s, told me, "It was all triumph for western propaganda. My British sources purported not to know what was going on, but they knew ... British warships escorted a ship full of Indonesian troops down the Malacca Straits so they could take part in this terrible holocaust."

Today, PR propaganda dressed up as scholarship promotes the same rapacious British power while seeking to fix the boundaries of public discussion. A report released last week by the Institute for Public Policy Research describes itself as "the UK's leading progressive think tank". Having been emptied of its dictionary meaning, the once noble term "progressive" joins "democracy" and "centre-left" as deception. Lord George

Robertson, the New Labour warmonger, Trident devotee and ex-Nato boss, has his moniker at the front, along with Paddy Ashdown, ex-viceroy of the Balkans. Couched in crisis management cliches, the IPPR report is a "call to action" because "weak, corrupt and failing states have become bigger security risks than strong, competitive ones". With western state terror unmentionable, the "call" is for Nato in Africa and military intervention "if deemed necessary".

Unsubstantiated references to "terrorist plots on British soil" include barely a nod to the "perception among Muslims" that the current Anglo-American "intervention" in the Middle East and northern Asia is the blindingly obvious cause. In February 2003, almost 80% of Londoners believed that a British attack on Iraq "would make a terrorist attack on London more likely". This was precisely the warning given to Blair by the Joint Intelligence Committee. The warning is no less urgent while "we" continue to assault other people's countries and allow false champions to appropriate all our human rights.

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