

Response from Shay Bernthal, manager of the Ariel Municipal Football Club (Moadon Kaduregel Ironi Ariel), sent via e-mail on September 19, 2016:

I willingly and happily hosted [the Human Rights Watch representative], out of a sense of transparency and the knowledge I have nothing to hide. On the contrary, I am proud of the football project that's been put together.

I am certain that during her visit, not only did she not find anything wrong with the activities, but rather she was able to see the beauty and purity of the activity – football and leisure and nothing more.

Regretfully, not only did you not mention this in what you call a “report” or “research”, but you chose to reach conclusions whose bottom line is completely unrelated to its content.

Both the semantics you used and the facts are marred with errors and a lack of understanding of the project. There is no “business activity” here. This is a voluntary club, and receives no support from the Israel Football Association, quite the opposite, the club pays fees and funds activities through payments made by parents, donations, personal wealth and a modest allocation from local tax payer money subject to the law and to the regulations of the Ministry of Interior. The allocation is currently less than 45 percent, contrary to what you noted, and it goes down every year. So far, I have received no support from the Gambling Board [public grant-making body using lottery moneys] in particular, and other bodies in general, since the operating charity is a new charity.

The alternative to lack of activity and/or the “solution” you suggest – to relocate activity from the community into the “Green Line” means, at best, ending the activity – who is going to drive 50 km to host clubs?! Who is going to violate the laws of the Sabbath for this?! The result would be throwing kids into the streets because they have nothing to keep them busy. Boredom would lead only to bad things.

In your “solution”, which has nothing to do with what you wrote in the “report” itself, you would cause more hatred, alienation, strife and fighting with the surrounding area and the Palestinian villages around us, and in this, not only would you not contribute to equality and good will, but to war and conflict. By the way, to the best of my knowledge, Ariel was built on abandoned, not private, land.

Is this what you wanted?! In choosing to go fishing in the ‘murky waters’ of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and more than that, to drag the children into it – it seems as if your end justifies your means. Is that not so?! And your means are: to monitor and to stop us from educational sports activities and give fodder to those who oppose co-existence and in so doing, appease funders and draw your salary, and your friends’ salary, and

make a living off it? I have apparently reached the sad conclusion that this is in fact the case.

I opened my door, with my hand extended in peace – so maybe you could change your attitude and try to organize a friendly match between us and one of the nearby villages?!

If you do this, I'll stand by your side, and together we will work to bring people closer. I'll convince my side, the Zionist Jewish side, and you'll convince your side – the Arab Palestinian side.

If not – it means that your entire goal is hate and destruction, so what's the point in collaborating?!

It seems that you fired the arrow first, and only later decided what mark you intended to hit. The arrow: a pseudo-professional visit to a football field, the mark: hitting the communities and the residents you call "settlements and settlers". I have yet to understand the connection between the report and its conclusions.

You did not mention that the collaboration between me and clubs from the [Arab] sector is excellent. You did not mention the club's activities against racism and violence, and you did not mention what concrete action I took to try and promote peace: a game against a Palestinian club, having two Muslim players on my adult team and more. Is it because you were not open to hear this or because it doesn't fit your organization's agenda?! Only you know the answer.

I'd be interested in finding out which of the lines I've written here you choose to quote going forward.

Sports have nothing to do with politics, and therefore, the activity of my club has nothing to do with politics. The context, and the attempt to spark conflict is yours and yours alone.

It is even more regrettable to drag my children and youth into this equation.

And remember – making a living and hatred are not the goals of life. For me – the way is moderation and love to achieve peace and equality.

Let me know what you choose.