



### [Former Human Rights Watch Head Denied Position at Harvard Over Israel Criticism](#)

The prestigious Harvard University has recently received criticism after rescinding a fellowship offer from Kenneth Roth, the former executive director of Human Rights Watch, over the group's criticism of Israel. Among the organizations condemning Harvard's decision are the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) and Pen American. Both of these organizations are well-respected advocates for freedom of expression. The ACLU called the refusal "profoundly troubling." In a self-authored op-ed in *The Guardian*, Roth called into question the reason why Harvard's Kennedy School had retracted their offer. As far as anyone can tell, the reason why his fellowship was vetoed by Douglas Elmendorf, the Kennedy school's dean, was because of his concern with the potential reaction of donors. "If any academic institution can afford to abide by principle, to refuse to compromise academic freedom under real or presumed donor pressure, it is Harvard, the world's richest university." Elmendorf himself sighted a so-called anti-Israel bias. He referenced the multiple tweets and articles by the NRW that were critical of Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Chief among these articles was the 2021 one report titled "A Threshold Crossed." In this report, HRW outlines the persecution of the Palestinian people by Israeli authorities. The piece concluded that these crimes constituted Apartheid. This article was met with an intense amount of resistance from the pro-Israel lobby. Elements of the immensely powerful lobby, including NGO Watch have welcomed this decision. This organization, headed by Gerald Steinberg, reports on alleged anti-Israel bias by International NGOs.

Originally recruited by the Harvard Kennedy School's Carr Center for Human Rights Policy, Roth seems like the perfect candidate. He has been informally involved with the school since its founding in 1999. Carr had recently left HRW after leading it for 29 years. During his tenure as leader, he had grown the organization's budget from \$7 million to nearly \$100 million and expanded the number of employees from 60 to 550. The organization now monitors over 100 countries for human rights abuses. Roth was dubbed the father of human rights by the *New York Times* just last year. HRW, under his leadership, played an instrumental role in the establishment of the International Criminal Court and securing the convictions of many of those tried there. As far as the charges of anti-Semitism and bias against Israel, there has never been any credible evidence that either HRW or Ken Roth has been biased against Israel. Human Rights Watch has only provided an unrelenting resolve to hold human rights abusers and authoritarian governments accountable.

Kenneth Roth is qualified for this position in every sense of the word. Dean Elmendorf's withdrawal of the fellowship position offer violates freedom of speech. It also sends a chilling affect throughout the academic world showing that any criticism of Israel, no matter how justified, could potentially be a career ending move. This stifles academic freedom and will further the whitewashing of Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people. In his op-ed, Roth recognizes that Roth has long been the target of the pro-Israel lobby. They have accused him of anti-Semitism, despite his father being a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany. He often cites this as the driving force for his work in human rights. Academic organizations cannot and should not bow to donor-driven censorship. Moving forward, the University should be urged to not accept contributions from donors who will use their influence to censor academic work. Kenneth Roth has now accepted a visiting fellowship at the University of Pennsylvania.