A Human Rights Council Worthy of the Name

December 9, 2015

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The Washington Times

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2015/dec/9/ileana-ros-lehtinen-un-human-rights-council-must-b/>

As we commemorate [Human Rights Day](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/human-rights-day/) and the 67th anniversary of the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on Thursday, President Obama should show he’s serious about these values and principles by directly confronting the flaws of the [U.N. Human Rights Council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/).

On [Human Rights Day](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/human-rights-day/) 2008, then President-elect Obama declared, “When the United States stands up for human rights, by example at home and by effort abroad, we align ourselves with men and women around the world who struggle for the right to speak their minds, to choose their leaders, and to be treated with dignity and respect.” So where has this effort abroad been? One need not look any further than its failed policy of engagement with the [U.N. Human Rights Council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) to see the lack of effort undertaken by the Obama administration to stand up for human rights by example and by effort.

In 2009, the Obama administration reversed standing U.S. foreign policy by joining and funding with taxpayer dollars the [U.N. Human Rights Council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) — a multilateral body tasked with promoting and defending human rights and upholding the tenets enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Then-U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Susan Rice argued that the administration believes that “working from within, [it] can make the council a more effective forum to promote and protect human rights.” However, since 2009, the [council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) has been bad, if not worse, than it has ever been. Only this time around, it has been given the appearance of legitimacy, thanks to the administration’s continued presence on and funding for that body.

In recent years, the [council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) has become so disconnected from its mandate that it doesn’t even feign impartiality or purport to promote universal human rights. In fact, the opposite is true: The [council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) has become the tool for the world’s dictators to shield themselves from scrutiny and obscure their heinous actions, perverting human rights to whitewash gross violations and effectively ensuring that the body cannot do what it was designed to do.

In just the past several weeks, the [U.N. Human Rights Council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) called special sessions to invite Palestinian Authority leader Abu Mazen and Venezuela’s Nicolas Maduro to address the [council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/). The former has openly incited violence against Israel for years while ignoring the plight of the Palestinian people, and the latter is responsible for countless human rights abuses that have led to untold innocent civilian deaths. These thugs should be called in front of the [council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) and held accountable for their actions, not lauded and encouraged by like-minded sympathizers.

More than half of the current members on the [council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) are ranked just partly free or not free by Freedom House’s annual Freedom in the World report, including some of the world’s worst human rights violators such as China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Vietnam, Venezuela and Cuba. All of these nations were highlighted by the State Department’s most recent Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for placing grotesque restrictions on freedom and rights, and for abusive governance practices. Yet, earlier this year, Saudi Arabia was announced as the chairman of an important and influential panel on the [council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/). While Saudi Arabia plays a vital role in countering terror threats in the region, its abysmal human rights record should preclude it from leading any panel on the issue and it should be greeted with outright opposition.

Instead of focusing on the perpetrators of gross human rights violations and working to protect the millions across the world that suffer, the [U.N. Human Rights Council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) opts instead to single out the one country in a Middle East region that respects and defends human rights for all of its citizens — the democratic Jewish state of Israel. The [council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/)’s agenda contains a permanent item for criticism of Israel — a distinction no other country shares. Since 2006, the [council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) has passed more than 61 resolutions and produced several mendacious reports alleging Israeli human rights abuses while virtually ignoring every other dire human rights situation in the world.

The structure and composition of the [U.N. Human Rights Council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) have made it subject to gross political manipulation while human rights protections around the world continue to regress, and all of this continues as the Obama administration has failed to win any substantive reforms. It has been nearly seven years, and it is clear that President Obama’s strategy of change from within at the [council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/) has been an abject failure, or human rights is so low on the president’s priority list that he’s unwilling to make the necessary effort — or both.

Mr. Obama must demand fundamental reforms of the body, or he must lead an effort to have it dissolved and replaced with a credible alternative. There is precedent for this already: The U.N. Commission on Human Rights, was disbanded in 2006 after being found to be morally bankrupt, reprehensible and completely lacking in credibility. We’re once again at that crossroads. Promoting and defending human rights worldwide is part and parcel of upholding not just America’s core values, but also our democratic commitments and our national security interests. On this [Human Rights Day](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/human-rights-day/), it’s time for the president to finally demonstrate that the United States stands up for human rights by example and effort, and it must start at the [U.N. Human Rights Council](http://www.washingtontimes.com/topics/un-human-rights-council/).