Is it Time for the US to Resign from the Human Rights Council?

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Israel is working to persuade the Trump government to withdraw from the UN Human Rights Council, and Deputy Prime Minister Michael Oren has begun a campaign to persuade the US to quit the council he calls an "anti-Semitic body."

Oren spoke yesterday with Deputy Secretary of State Erin Berkley, who earlier this month addressed the council in Geneva and called on them to stop their obsession with Israel. The United States is one of 47 council members and their three-year membership is due to end in 2019. "The US government headed by Donald Trump is examining his participation in the UN human rights body in order to promote a reform that will lead to a more balanced agenda that will end the organization's obsession with Israel. In order for the Council to have any credibility, and especially in order to succeed in its role, it must abandon its unbalanced and ineffective positions. When we look at our continued conduct, my administration will consider the Council's actions with a view to reform - in order to achieve the Council's goals of protecting and promoting human rights, "Berkeley said.

Berkeley added: "The United States continues to be very concerned about its consistent, unfair and unbalanced focus on one democratic state, Israel. At present, North Korea and Iran are denying millions of people the right to freedom of religion, belief, assembly, freedom of association and freedom of expression. "The obsession with Israel is the greatest threat to the credibility of the Council. It limits the good we can achieve by making this council a mockery. The United States will oppose any effort to delegitimize or isolate Israel. Not only in the Human Rights Council, but everywhere it happens. When it comes to human rights, no country should be free from criticism, but there should not be a situation in which a democratic state is always judged unfairly, unbalanced or based on unfounded prejudices."

"I very much hope that some of the changes in foreign policy and policy toward Israel in particular will be one of the changes that the US will stop legitimizing for a body that is not only anti-Israel but also anti-Semitic," said Oren. Berkeley replied to Oren that the administration was considering exiting the body. Oren said, "I certainly enjoyed a sympathetic ear."

In addition, Oren held a number of discussions on the subject with members of Congress. US Secretary of State Tillerson also published an article on the subject in which he said that the US demands reforms from the Council otherwise the US will leave.

The Bush administration withdrew its ambassador from the council in 2006 partly because of the anti-Israel nature of the council. Obama returned the ambassador and refused Israeli demands to withdraw him on the grounds that the American presence on the council could change the council from within.

Michael Oren believes that it is precisely the American presence that legitimizes a body that is fundamentally anti-Israeli. "The Americans did not succeed during the Obama administration in bringing about any change for us in the council, and our situation has only deteriorated," he added.