Guterres and Haley Can’t Do It Alone, Democracies Must Stand Up To End U.N. Farce

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<http://www.newsweek.com/antonio-guterres-nikki-haley-democraciesun-572020>

Good news from the United Nations is rare, so it was a surprise when on Friday and Monday, two positive developments emerged. On Friday, after commendable efforts from both U.N. Secretary General Ant ó nio Guterres and U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley, Rima Khalaf resigned. Khalaf was the Executive Secretary of the U.N. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), one of many seemingly innocuously titled U.N. agencies that on closer inspection, is anything but.

I was the first to call for her dismissal, [back in 2014](http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4509194,00.html) when she published a report comparing Israel to Nazi Germany—an inherently anti-Semitic position. Never mind that Israel is the only state in the Middle East where the equal democratic rights of minority citizens are enshrined and protected by the rule of law. Or that next door in Syria, genocidal slaughter at the hands of the Assad regime was already long underway. Israel’s identity as a Jewish State is the real threat, Khalaf told us.

For years, she used her agency as a vehicle to ram into Israel’s legitimacy, demonizing the Jewish state and pumping anti-Israeli pollution into the U.N.’s atmosphere. The U.N. provided an environment for such lies to fester. Ban Ki Moon was largely silent in the face of them, even when he knew they were absurd. This year, Khalaf struck again, with [a report slandering Israel as an “apartheid state.”](http://www.newsweek.com/israel-palestine-conflict-apartheid-568591) Yet Guterres, the new secretary general, spoke up, demanding that she withdraw the report and prompting her resignation. Khalaf’s reports, which rewrote and distorted history, have now been consigned to the dustbin.

Guterres deserves credit, but it will take more than one resignation to bring real change. Reforms are long overdue but desperately needed if the U.N. is to shed its reputation for bloated, ludicrous hypocrisy and restore trust and credibility to international institutions.

No U.N. agency embodies its failings more than the paradoxically titled U.N. Human Rights Council—which brings me to the second positive development—on Monday, when the U.S. refused to take part in the council’s discussion about alleged Israeli human rights abuses. “Today’s actions in the council are yet another reminder of that body’s longstanding bias against Israel,” [said State Department spokesman Mark Toner](https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/03/268525.htm).

He also called out the [scandal of “Agenda Item Seven.”](https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2017/03/268525.htm) At every meeting of the Council, Israel is the only country debated under its very own agenda item. Between 2009 and 2016, the UNHRC adopted [42 resolutions](http://www.universal-rights.org/human-rights/human-rights-resolutions-portal-/) under Agenda Item Seven, which deals solely with Israel, and only [58 resolutions](http://www.universal-rights.org/human-rights/human-rights-resolutions-portal-/) under Agenda Item Four, which deals with the rest of the world.

This structural, institutional discrimination explains how a council comprising some of the most brutal human rights abusers in the world, such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Venezuela, condemns the Middle East’s only democracy with such disproportionate zeal. It helps explain how in the past decade though more than 300,000 civilians and noncombatants have been killed in wars in Sudan, [55,000 children killed in Syria](http://www.iamsyria.org/death-tolls.html) and more than [3,000 people executed in Iran](http://www.ncr-iran.org/en/ncri-statements/human-rights/22298-iranian-resistance-condemns-presence-of-mullahs-representatives-in-bundestag), Israel has received more condemnation than those countries combined.

Secretary General Guterres and Ambassador Haley are showing encouraging commitment to reform. That work must continue. One resignation will not bring lasting progress to the U.N. One powerful statement from the U.S. will not alone reform the Human Rights Council. Rima Khalaf was not a bad apple—there are more in the barrel—like Leila Zerrougui, Under-Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, who turns a blind eye to Assad’s barrel bombs while condemning Israel’s attempts to defend itself. Or Christopher Gunness, Chief Spokesperson for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), whose schools have been used by Hamas to [store weapons.](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/07/31/why-hamas-stores-its-weapons-inside-hospitals-mosques-and-schools/?utm_term=.be724d14a5a2)

At the Human Rights Council, other democratic states can take inspiration from America’s principled stance. Now, instead of leading from behind, they can join the U.S. in leading from the front. European members of the Council, including major powers like the U.K. and Germany, should defend their stated values of fair play with renewed confidence. They too should take a stand against the flagrant and institutionalized racism and discrimination towards the Jewish state laid bare by Agenda Item Seven.

For too long, democracies have gone along with what they knew to be a farce. Only if we are honest, courageous and determined in calling out this abomination, will the world get international institutions that are credible, dependable and fit for purpose. It is time for democracies to stand up. It is time for change.