



BETTER
WORLD
CAMPAIGN



human rights *first*

American ideals. Universal values.



HUMAN
RIGHTS
CAMPAIGN



The Jacob Blaustein Institute
for the Advancement of Human Rights



UNITED NATIONS ASSOCIATION
of the United States of America
A PROGRAM OF THE UNITED NATIONS FOUNDATION

February 9, 2017

The Honorable Rex Wayne Tillerson
Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr. Secretary:

As organizations committed to global leadership by the United States and the advancement of human rights, we congratulate you on your confirmation as Secretary of State and urge you to maintain U.S. engagement with the UN Human Rights Council. Since 2009 when the United States began participating in the work of the Council, it has been instrumental in making the Council a more effective body. Strong American leadership at the Council has advanced our nation's interests and values on a range of human rights priorities. Continued leadership in the years ahead will be essential to maintain these important achievements.

Without active engagement by the United States, the Council struggled during its first few years to fulfill its mandate to address international human rights challenges; it devoted inadequate attention to some of the worst human rights violations—and violators—in the world and focused disproportionate attention on Israel. American leadership in the Council over the last seven years has helped shift that dynamic. Since 2009, the Council has increasingly trained a spotlight on rogue regimes and terrorists, commissioning independent investigations that have exposed serious human rights abuses by North Korea, Iran, Syria, ISIS, and Boko Haram. At the urging of the United States, the Council has also addressed critical issues including freedom of association, free expression on the Internet, religious liberty, and preventing violence against vulnerable populations including women, LGBT individuals, and religious minorities.

The United States has steadfastly opposed the Council's biased treatment of Israel and, as the Council focused its attention in recent years on a greater number of human rights violators, the proportion of the Council's resolutions and special sessions devoted to Israel has significantly declined.

In October, the United States was elected by the UN General Assembly to another three-year term on the Human Rights Council, after serving as a member for two consecutive terms from 2009-2015 and taking a mandatory year off in 2016. This is a critical time for the United States to continue its participation and funding, while redoubling efforts to strengthen the Council's performance. However imperfect, the Council is the only global intergovernmental body addressing some of the most pressing human rights challenges of our time. Its importance is recognized by America's friends and allies, human rights defenders—particularly those operating under repressive regimes—and its record has improved markedly as a direct result of U.S. membership and engagement. Disengagement from the Council would leave a vacuum, and states that do not share our nation's interests and values would fill it, resulting in less condemnation of the world's worst human rights abusers, more action directed against Israel, and more repressive governments gaining membership in the Council. None of these outcomes serves America's interests.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to working with you in the future to support continued U.S. global leadership on human rights and build on the progress already made in enhancing the effectiveness of the UN Human Rights Council.

Sincerely,

Peter Yeo, President, Better World Campaign

Greg Scarlatoiu, Executive Director, Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK)

Robert Herman, Vice President for Emergency Assistance Programs and Multilateral Advocacy Initiatives, Freedom House

Maran Turner, Executive Director, Freedom Now

Elisa Massimino, President and CEO, Human Rights First

Ty Cobb, Director, HRC Global, Human Rights Campaign

Felice Gaer, Director, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights

Chris Whatley, Executive Director, United Nations Association of the United States of America