

Testimony of Jordie Hannum
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Corporate Social Impact
“United States Standing in International Organizations”
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Chairman Castro, Ranking Member Malliotakis, Members of the Subcommittee—thank you for the opportunity to testify today about America’s standing in international organizations. I’m Jordie Hannum, Executive Director of the Better World Campaign, an organization whose mission is to support a strong and constructive U.S.-UN relationship by educating policymakers about the importance of the UN’s work and how it advances U.S. interests.

Nearly 76 years ago, in the wake of the deadliest and most destructive conflict the world has ever witnessed, the United States and 49 other countries came together to establish the United Nations. Tasked with preventing and suppressing threats to international peace and security, encouraging respect for human rights, and facilitating cooperation on a broad suite of international economic, social, and humanitarian issues, the UN became a core component of the international order that the U.S. helped build and lead after World War II. And while the world has changed significantly since 1945, the UN’s role as a force-multiplier for the U.S.—a key mechanism for multilateral diplomacy to mitigate conflict, as well as for marshalling the necessary resources and political will to address challenges that no country can resolve alone—remains as vital as ever.

To frame this conversation on U.S. standing at the UN and the importance of U.S. engagement, I believe it would be helpful to talk about the U.S.-UN relationship in terms of what I call the 4 C’s: Cooperation, COVID, Credibility, and Competition.

- **Cooperation:** As noted above, no country, no matter how large or powerful, can hope to resolve the world’s problems alone. We need alliances, partnerships, and burden-sharing arrangements like the UN to accomplish that. The importance of these types of force-multipliers was recently expounded upon by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin in an op-ed for *The Washington Post*. In it they write that through such arrangements: “We’re able to achieve far more...than we could without them. No country on Earth has a network of alliances and partnerships like ours. It would be a huge strategic error to neglect these relationships. And it’s a wise use of our time and resources to adapt and renew them, to ensure they’re as strong and effective as they can be.”
- **COVID:** This is particularly salient when we talk about the COVID-19 pandemic. The last year has demonstrated that a disease outbreak in one country can spread rapidly beyond its origin point, becoming a threat to the health, prosperity, and well-being of every person on the planet. Addressing these issues requires engagement with international standard-setting bodies like the World Health Organization (WHO), which has been working from the outset to provide vital equipment and testing supplies to countries with weak health systems; develop and disseminate technical guidance for preventing the spread of COVID-19; supporting international efforts to research therapeutics; and create a mechanism for distributing vaccines equitably to end the pandemic once and for all.

Unfortunately, the UN’s ability to act as a force-multiplier is jeopardized when we fail to meet our commitments to the organization. The last four years have witnessed a dramatic and troubling erosion of U.S. engagement with the UN: we have pulled out of key UN bodies and agreements that have been working to advance our interests, while

simultaneously racking up more than \$1.1 billion in peacekeeping arrears alone. These policies have negatively impacted our ability to resume a leadership position on the global stage.

- **Credibility:** When we shun our responsibilities, other countries take note. According to the Pew Research Center, unilateral actions such as those described above have contributed to the image of the United States reaching its lowest point in twenty years, even among our allies. But credibility is not just a popularity contest; it is key to our ability to advance our national interests and values on the world stage and push back against countries who seek to subvert them. In her testimony during her Senate confirmation hearing, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield addressed this issue head-on in the context of U.S. arrears: “Not paying our bills really does diminish our power and it diminishes our leadership. We need to pay our bills to have a seat at the table...We know that when we cede our leadership, others jump in very quickly to fill the void and we need to make sure that we’re there to push back on those who would have malign intentions at the UN.”

Our diminished credibility has helped create a strategic opportunity for those with malign intentions and global competitors, particularly Russia and China.

- **Competition:** China is now the second largest financial contributor to the UN’s assessed budgets, the tenth largest contributor of troops to UN peacekeeping missions and has expanded its influence in a range of UN specialized agencies and other entities. As the U.S. has stepped back, China and Russia have become even more assertive in challenging aspects of the UN’s work that advance American interests and values, particularly human rights. If the U.S. does not act quickly and decisively to restore its standing in the UN, these countries’ ability to fill the vacuum will only accelerate.

As outlined below, I will discuss in greater detail the importance of the UN’s force-multiplying work, how it advances U.S. interests, as well as further address concerns related to the U.S.’s standing and our competitors’ ongoing efforts to expand their own profiles at the organization.

Confronting COVID and Delivering Humanitarian Relief

The last year has highlighted just how crucial the work of international organizations like the UN are to ensuring the health and safety of Americans. Last March, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a global pandemic. Since then, more than 120 million people around the world have fallen ill, and close to 2.7 million have died, including more than 540,000 Americans. The pandemic has seriously curtailed global economic activity, leaving many of the world’s most vulnerable people on even more precarious footing: the UN has warned that 235 million people require humanitarian assistance this year—a 40% increase over 2020 that is almost entirely related to the fallout from COVID-19.

The WHO has been an essential partner in formulating and implementing a collective international response to this disaster. As the global standard-setter on public health issues, integrated into the health ministries of more than 150 countries, the WHO’s reach and depth is unmatched. From the outset of the crisis, WHO has distributed diagnostic kits and PPE to dozens of countries with weak health systems; formulated technical guidance for communities, hospitals, private sector partners, and public health authorities; carried out public awareness campaigns in dozens of languages in 149 countries; and, through its “Solidarity Trial,” worked to enable rapid and accurate research on the effectiveness of potential therapeutics.

Of particular note, the WHO’s early decision to focus its pandemic response on testing—deeming it the “backbone” of any response—proved to be key to saving lives and reducing the virus’s spread. It must also be noted that had the

United States not tried to go it alone and instead adopted the WHO test – [which the organization made public on Jan. 13](#) and several countries wasted no time in implementing – [more lives in this country would have been saved](#).

Overall, WHO's invaluable assistance was one reason there was such widespread opposition to the Trump Administration attempt to withdraw from the organization. [Groups representing infectious disease doctors, pediatricians and general physicians](#) all protested the decision, as did the [Chamber of Commerce](#). Even the [Heritage Foundation announced](#) its opposition to defunding, stating that slashing our contributions may be interpreted as abandoning vulnerable countries in their time of need and it would play into the hands of countries, like China, who would seek to distract from their role in the outbreak and portray the U.S. as uninterested in helping nations combat COVID-19.

Going forward, the WHO is at the forefront of efforts—working with partners like the Global Fund, Gavi, the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI), and others—to ensure equitable global distribution of COVID-19 vaccines. Through a new coordination initiative known as COVAX, these entities are working to distribute two billion vaccines, along with essential supplies like syringes, to low and middle-income countries by the end of 2021. While access to vaccines in the U.S. is increasing, as long as COVID-19 circulates unchecked, it remains a threat to the health and safety of Americans. For example, we could see the emergence of variants that compromise the effectiveness of our vaccines, to say nothing of further disruptions to the global economy caused by continued cycles of outbreaks and lockdowns abroad. Put simply, the only way we will ultimately defeat the virus in this country is by fighting it overseas as well, and COVAX is a key mechanism to help us do that.

Beyond confronting the health-related aspects of the pandemic, the UN is also playing a central role in addressing the severe humanitarian dislocations caused by the virus. For example, in Yemen - currently the world's worst humanitarian crisis, where 80% of the population is dependent on aid in order to survive - the lifesaving work of the UN is especially pronounced.

Last year, the World Food Program (WFP) scaled up its operations to provide more than 10 million people with monthly food assistance through direct food distributions or vouchers and provided nutritional support to over 1 million pregnant or nursing women and children under 5. With one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the Arab States region, the UN Population Fund (UNFPA) is working to improve the availability and quality of reproductive health services in the country. During 2020, UNFPA was able to reach nearly 3 million people in need and trained more than 300 midwives to provide safe deliveries and care for pregnant women displaced by the conflict. Meanwhile, UNICEF and WHO have played a crucial role in responding to a cholera epidemic, while the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) provides housing assistance to families who have been forced to flee their homes due to violence.

These types of efforts are not confined to Yemen. Throughout the globe, UN humanitarian agencies act as a kind of 9-11 service, deploying to some of the most dangerous and challenging operating environments to bring life-sustaining relief to the world's most vulnerable communities. Due to its high degree of international legitimacy and capacity to operate in places beyond our reach, the UN is an indispensable implementing partner for the U.S. government's own efforts to address significant global humanitarian and health issues.

Protecting International Peace and Security

The main reason that the U.S. and its allies decided to create the UN in the first place was to prevent conflict and address threats to global stability. The most visible manifestation of the UN's commitment to these goals is its peacekeeping operations. Currently, there are 12 UN peacekeeping operations deployed to hotspots on three

continents, tasked with separating warring parties, protecting civilians, supporting democratic elections, and providing a foundation on which fragile states can work towards a more sustainable peace. Peacekeeping operations are authorized by the UN Security Council, on which the U.S. has a permanent seat and veto power. As a result, American diplomats play a decisive role in determining each mission's mandate, its force levels, and the duration of its deployment.

Decades of data have shown peacekeeping to be beneficial in a host of ways. For example, one study examining civil wars in sub-Saharan Africa found that in places where no peacekeeping troops were deployed, average monthly civilian deaths totaled 106. In situations where at least 8,000 UN troops were present, by contrast, civilian deaths dropped by 98%. The study concluded that ensuring UN peacekeeping forces “are appropriately tasked and deployed in large numbers” is critical to their ability to protect civilians.¹ In subsequent years, an additional “avalanche of evidence” has made clear that peacekeepers protect civilians, save lives, shorten the duration of conflicts, contain the geographic spread of war, reduce their likelihood of reoccurrence, and reduce sexual and gender-based violence.²

What is also remarkable is that this lifesaving work is being done at such a relatively low financial cost. With nearly 86,000 personnel—soldiers, police, and civilians—currently serving around the world, UN peacekeeping is the second-largest military force deployed abroad (after the U.S.). And yet, the total budget for the UN's peacekeeping activities is just \$6.5 billion, less than 1% of what the U.S. will spend on its own military this year. Moreover, a 2018 report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office found that deploying UN peacekeepers is eight times less expensive than U.S. forces.³

Finally, UN peacekeeping is an excellent example of international burden-sharing. The UN has no standing army, and therefore depends on Member States to voluntarily contribute uniformed personnel to serve on these missions. Despite its pivotal role on the UN Security Council, the U.S. provides very few of its own uniformed personnel: currently just several dozen out of nearly 75,000. Dozens of other Member States—including Tanzania, Jordan, Indonesia, Bangladesh, and Nepal—provide the bulk of the rest, ensuring that no country undertakes the burden of carrying out these missions alone.

The State of U.S. Engagement and the Rise of Strategic Competitors

Over the last 7 decades, the U.S.-UN relationship has gone through its fair share of peaks and valleys. Nevertheless, the last 4 years witnessed a particularly dramatic and troubling erosion of U.S. engagement and standing at the UN. During the Trump Administration, the U.S. pulled out of the Paris Agreement; withheld funding from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), UNFPA, and the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights; withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO); and attempted to pull the U.S. out of the WHO amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, Congress and the Administration worked in tandem to enforce an arbitrary 25% cap on U.S. contributions to UN peacekeeping operations, meaning that we have not been paying our dues in-full, even though U.S. diplomats signed off on our assessment rates at the UN. As a result, the U.S. has accrued more than \$1.1 billion in arrears on our peacekeeping assessments since Fiscal Year 2017.

¹ Hultman, Lisa, Jacob Kathman, and Megan Shannon. 2013. “United Nations Peacekeeping and Civilian Protection in Civil War.” *American Journal of Political Science* 57(4): 875-91.

² Morjé Howard, Lise. “Give Peacekeeping a Chance.” Oxford Research Group. <https://www.oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk/blog/give-peacekeeping-a-chance>. 29 May 2019; https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/fp_20210211_africa_peacekeeping_transcript.pdf

³ “UN Peacekeeping Cost Estimate for Hypothetical U.S. Operation Exceeds Actual Costs for Comparable UN Operation.” Government Accountability Office GAO-18-243. February 2018.

U.S. underpayments to the regular and peacekeeping budgets are contributing to yawning cash deficits at the UN, what has been deemed a financial crisis for the organization. For countries who participate in peacekeeping missions, they are not being fully reimbursed for their contributions of personnel and equipment. This creates significant challenges for troop-contributors, most of whom are lower-income countries that rely on reimbursements to help sustain complex longer-term peacekeeping deployments.

These systematic underpayments also occurred as U.S. competitors like China and Russia have expanded their own roles within the multilateral system, filling vacuums left by the U.S. and using their newfound influence to challenge the dominance of American interests and values. As I noted earlier, China is now the second largest financial contributor to UN assessed budgets, providing 12% of the UN regular budget and more than 15% of the peacekeeping budget. It is also the 10th largest contributor of uniformed personnel to peacekeeping operations, outpacing all contributions by the other four permanent members of the Security Council combined. Beyond financial and troop contributions, China has also aggressively pushed to expand its role in a range of UN-affiliated institutions, successfully pushing for the installation of Chinese nationals at the helm of four of the organization's fifteen specialized agencies.

A more assertive China and Russia has implications for a wide swathe of our multilateral agenda, but it is perhaps most concerning with regards to the UN's work on human rights. Unfortunately, the U.S.'s absence from the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) over the last 2 ½ years has given Russia and China greater opportunities to shape the institution in a way that more closely hews to their own policy priorities and values. Specifically, these countries have become more aggressive in promoting a state-centric vision of human rights that is at odds with the UN's founding principles: one that devalues minority rights, elevates "state sovereignty" over the rights of the individual, gives primacy to economic and social rights over crucial civil and political rights, and mutes criticism of individual countries' human rights records, particularly their own. Sadly, they have found willing allies for these efforts: in 2019, for example, China was joined by 37 other countries in a statement at the Council extolling Beijing's treatment of Uighur Muslims in Xinjiang. Unfortunately, because the U.S. has largely been on the outside looking in, our ability to push back against these efforts has been limited: a counter statement criticizing China's treatment of Uighurs and calling for the UNHRC to investigate the issue received just 22 signatories.

These efforts to undermine human rights norms extend beyond the UNHRC. In 2018, for example, Russia and China pushed for the elimination of a number of human rights monitoring and civilian protection posts in UN peacekeeping missions. Of note, their efforts in this case were premised not on any public rejection of human rights mandates in peacekeeping missions per se, but rather, on the budgetary limitations caused by the Trump Administration's focus on funding cuts. That same year, China and Russia teamed up again and successfully sought to cut funding for the Human Rights Upfront Initiative, a program in the Secretary-General's office that worked to ensure that all UN entities are prioritizing human rights in their field operations. While these efforts have met with varying degrees of success, the fact that they have even been tried in the first place is evidence of emboldened authoritarian regimes that are increasingly willing to use their influence—particularly, in the case, of China, its growing financial clout—to tilt the field in order to achieve the policy outcomes they desire.

Over the years, the U.S. has criticized the UNHRC for maintaining a disproportionate focus on Israel. It has also pointed out that some countries with seats on the Council have problematic human rights records that should disqualify them from serving in such positions. In 2018, when the Trump Administration resigned the U.S. seat on the Council, it cited these two factors as principal reasons for doing so.

These criticisms are certainly understandable and need to be addressed by the U.S. in concert with the rest of the UN's membership. However, despite the Council's imperfections, the record has clearly shown that we are much better served when we are at the table and participating in the UNHRC's work than when we withdraw. During the Obama Administration and the first 18 months of the Trump Administration, when the U.S. adopted a policy of principled engagement with the Council, the proportion of country-specific resolutions targeting Israel decreased considerably. When resolutions targeting Israel did come up, fewer countries voted for them: in March 2018, just three months before the U.S. withdrawal, the State Department itself reported that the Council saw "the largest shift in votes towards abstentions and no votes on Israel related resolutions since" its creation. Just as importantly, the UNHRC broadened its repertoire in a number of areas, establishing independent mechanisms to investigate human rights violations and push for accountability in Iran, North Korea, and Syria. The Council also adopted groundbreaking resolutions on cross-cutting thematic human rights issues, including LGBTI rights and freedom of expression on the Internet.

If the U.S. does not act fast to reassert its traditional role of leadership at the UN and undo the damage to our standing that has built up over the last four years, we will leave a void that our geopolitical competitors have shown they are more than willing, and increasingly able, to fill. That could mean a very different UN than the one the U.S. sought to create 76 years ago—one where U.S. foreign policy objectives and values are increasingly sidelined.

UN Reform & Strengthening

Before wrapping up my testimony, I would like to say a few words about the issue of reform. In recent years, the UN has undertaken a number of measures to make its operations more transparent and efficient. With regards to peacekeeping, for example, 10 years ago, the UN initiated efforts that reduced the cost per peacekeeper by 18 percent and cut the number of support staff on peacekeeping missions by 4,000 to save on administrative costs. The UN also undertook important efforts to combat sexual exploitation and abuse by UN personnel, has made significant progress on achieving gender parity in its senior leadership, promulgated stronger whistleblower protections, and sought to strengthen the role of Resident Coordinators—officials responsible for heading up the UN's development work on the ground—in order to make the UN's delivery of development assistance more streamlined and accountable. In a Wall Street Journal op-ed, the Secretary-General was praised for taking the lead against anti-Semitism.⁴

As with so many other elements of the UN, the achievement of these reforms would not have been possible without strong U.S. support and engagement. That means keeping our seat at the table, including paying our dues. As former Secretary of State and U.S. Ambassador to the UN Madeleine Albright has noted, "The failure to pay our old UN bills undermines our ability to meet critical U.S. foreign policy objectives...and to recruit allies for the kind of structural reform that Congress demands."

Nevertheless, that has not stopped some in Washington from advancing proposals that would cripple the organization, antagonize our own allies, further undermine our standing, and nullify our efforts to achieve meaningful and realistic reforms. One such idea would have the UN move from a funding structure that relies on both mandatory assessments and voluntary contributions from member states to an entirely voluntary financing scheme. This approach is problematic for several reasons:

- The fact that assessed funding structures require other countries to share in the financial burden is actually beneficial to the United States. All UN member states are required to help shoulder the UN's regular and peacekeeping budgets at specified levels. This, in turn, prevents U.S. taxpayers from being saddled with the

⁴ Foxman and Lasensky. "A Righteous U.N. Secretary-General." Wall Street Journal, June 27, 2018.

majority of these expenses. By contrast, the U.S. often pays more under voluntary funding arrangements. Successive Republican and Democratic administrations have recognized the limitations inherent in voluntary funding structures.⁵ In addition, a Congressionally-mandated Newt Gingrich-George Mitchell report on UN reform, for example, noted that such schemes are often slow and lead to U.S. priorities being underfunded.

The Path Forward

Addressing the challenge posed by Russia and China and ensuring that the UN continues to advance American interests requires more engagement, not less. Fortunately, the Biden Administration has already moved to renew our relationship with the UN. In just the last two months, the Administration has rejoined the Paris Agreement, halted the U.S. withdrawal from the WHO and paid arrears to that organization accrued under the Trump Administration, announced that it will run for a seat on the Human Rights Council when membership elections take place in the General Assembly later this year, and moved to restore U.S. funding for UNFPA. Crucially, President Biden has also restored the U.S. Ambassador to the UN as a Cabinet-level position, signaling the important role multilateral diplomacy will play in his Administration moving forward. My organization welcomes these significant policy shifts and believes they need to continue. But reengagement doesn't stop there. We believe that Congress and the Administration should also work together to:

- Repeal the 25% legislative cap on peacekeeping contributions and provide additional funding to pay back the more than \$1.1 billion in peacekeeping arrears we have accrued since FY'17.
- Resynchronize our payments to the UN, so that they come early in the Calendar Year rather than at the end of the U.S. Fiscal Year. Since the 1980s, the U.S. has paid the bulk of its UN assessments in the fall, even though the UN's fiscal year begins in January. This creates delays in payment that have contributed to an ongoing financial crisis at the UN, made proper budgeting and forecasting difficult, undermined U.S. reform messaging, and necessitated undesirable austerity measures like hiring freezes around positions that the U.S. generally supports. It also sets a poor example: other countries, such as Brazil, have begun to follow suit by delaying their own dues payments.
- Pay back more than \$90 million in arrears accrued in recent years due to the prior Administration's policy of withholding assessed funding for the Human Rights Council and High Commissioner for Human Rights.
- Mobilize support for equitable COVID-19 vaccine distribution to low and middle-income countries through COVAX. Research has demonstrated that the "U.S. would be likely to gain more than any other country" via equitable distribution through multilateral partners.⁶
- Restore funding to UNRWA commensurate with our pre-2018 contributions, following up on President Biden's announcement from late January.
- Rejoin the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

⁵ In June 2005, the House passed The UN Reform Act which would automatically withhold dues from the UN unless certain specific reforms are met, including switching to a voluntary system. The Bush Administration issued a Statement of Administration Policy (SAP) which said that it has "serious concerns" about the legislation because it "could detract from and undermine our efforts," and "asks that Congress reconsider this legislation."

⁶ <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/ending-the-covid-19-pandemic-the-need-for-a-global-approach>

- Prioritize U.S. engagement in UN forums, to include the Commission on the Status of Women, Generation Equality, the Conference on Population and Development, and the Global Compacts on Migration & Refugees.
- Nominate and appoint diverse candidates with multilateral backgrounds for positions at State/USAID/HHS.
- Congress and the Administration should also work together to provide more robust financial resources to the State Department and USAID. The U.S. international affairs budget makes up just over 1% of federal spending but plays an outsized role in advancing U.S. interests overseas. There are a number of proposals that Congress could potentially adopt, from increasing State and USAID budgets by \$12-16 billion, to doubling funding for foreign assistance over the next four years, to matching the proportion of GDP (0.6%) spent on foreign assistance during the Reagan Administration, versus the percentage (0.2%) we spend today. Regardless of what path we take, we need to ensure that our diplomatic and development efforts receive necessary resources to successfully take on the immense challenges we face today. In the midst of a pandemic that will cost \$28 trillion in lost output and has exacerbated poverty, famine, and instability, there really is no viable alternative.