**The UN's Mugabe Moment, and Its Perennial Iran Problem**

October 23, 2017

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PJ Media

<https://pjmedia.com/claudiarosett/uns-mugabe-moment-perennial-iran-problem/>

Every so often the United Nations decides to dignify a tyrant, or a tyranny, in ways so in-your-face perverse that it draws public attention, provokes highly embarrasing protest -- and the UN scuttles to back away. So it went with the recent decision by the World Health Organization to appoint as one of its goodwill ambassadors the longtime tyrant of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe.

On Oct. 18, the director-general of the WHO, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, of Ethiopia, announced he was "honored" to name Mugabe as a goodwill ambassador. For good measure, Tedros praised Zimbabwe as "a country that places universal health coverage and health promotion at the center of its policies to provide health care to all."

On Oct. 20, Geneva-based UN Watch put out a press release calling Mugabe's appointment "sickening," and noting that Mugabe's brutal rule had turned Zimbabwe from the breadbasket of Africa into a basketcase, devastating its health care system along the way -- while Mugabe went outside the country for his own medical needs. There was plenty of other protest, from the U.S., the UK, medical professionals worldwide, and so forth. On Oct. 22, Tedro announced he was rescinding Mugabe's appointment.

So... problem solved?

Nope, not by half. For the UN, the embarrassment will likely fade. But the over-arching problem here -- of which Mugabe's fleeting four days as a goodwill ambassador is merely a symptom -- is a United Nations that inveterately dignifies and honors tyrants and tyrannies, though usually in less prominent fashion.

For a sampling of just how deep this problem runs, take the case of Iran -- ruled since 1989 by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. This is a regime that President Trump accurately described in his Oct. 13 speech on the Iran nuclear deal as "having raided the wealth of one of the world's oldest and most vibrant nations, and spread death, destruction, and chaos all around the globe." Iran is the world's leading state sponsor of terrorism and leading predator of today's Middle East, with a record of terrorist bombings and assassinations carried out by its agents and mascot terrorist groups from the Middle East to Latin America to Europe to Asia. Iran's regime -- a longtime client of North Korea's weapons bazaar -- spent years cheating its way around UN sanctions on its rogue nuclear and missile programs, and under the current UN-approved nuclear deal has carried on, with brazen bad faith, testing ballistic missiles. Iran's regime brutalizes its own citizens, especially women, and in 2009 crushed mass protests by beating and shooting its own people in the streets. Remember the murder of Neda Soltan.

There's a solid argument to be made that under the UN's 1945 Charter, which says that membership is open to peace-loving states that respect human rights, today's Iran does not belong in the UN at all.

But at the UN, Iran's regime not only enjoys a seat as one of the 193 member states. It also enjoys the privileges of holding seats on a remarkable array of the governing boards of major UN agencies. These are positions less publicly prominent than that of a goodwill ambassador. But they are potentially more influential for directing the funds and activities of these agencies, accessing information, and horse-trading political favors behind the scenes.

Currently, Iran sits on the 36-member board of the UN's flagship agency, the UN Development Program, or UNDP, which disburses billions annually, and in field offices around the world serves as chief coordinator for other UN agencies, and doubles, when needed, as a representative of the secretary-general. Iran has a clear affinity for the UNDP, where it chaired the governing board in 2009, while under UN sanctions for its rogue nuclear program.

Iran, notorious for its repression of women, also sits on the executive board of UN Women -- the UN agency that is supposed to champion equal rights for women. Iran, which continues to carry out executions of people arrested as minors, also sits on the 36-member board of the UN's agency for children, UNICEF.

Iran also sits on the 58-member board of UNESCO, the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, as well as the 36-member executive board of the World Food Program.

There's probably more in this vein to be found, if you're in mood to spend hours rummaging through UN web sites. The UN does not provide any consolidated list of which member states serve on which executive boards, commissions and so forth. To track these things, you have to search board-by-board, which helps mask the extent to which despotisms such as Iran, Cuba, or -- yes-- Zimbabwe (which currently holds a seat on the executive board of the World Food Program) avail themselves of the perquisites of UN membership.

But the bottom line is this: Mugabe's appointment as a WHO goodwill ambassador provoked well-justified outrage, and it was at least commendable that the WHO rescinded an appointment it should never have made in the first place. But where's the outrage over the rolling depravities rooted far deeper within the UN system? When do the leaders of such major UN agencies as the UNDP, UN Women, UNICEF, UNESCO and the WFP stand up in public and protest the presence on their own governing boards of Iran, ruled by one of the most repressive, predatory and brutal regimes on the planet? When do the leaders of the Free World call attention to the problem that at the UN these Orwellian arrangements are entirely business as usual?