Cheer the US exit from UN Human Rights Council — but demand more

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At long last, the United States is leaving the United Nations Human Rights Council — a morally corrupt U.N. organ that flagrantly betrays the ideal it supposedly upholds. The council has been a microcosm of the U.N.'s fundamental moral bankruptcy.

Even as we should cheer the Trump administration's decision to step away from it, we must demand even more from the U.N.: a principled commitment to individual rights.

The U.N.'s Human Rights Council is infamous for serving the agenda of authoritarian and dictatorial regimes — while obsessively rebuking one particular free society that actually upholds rights, Israel.

In the first ten years of its existence, the Human Rights Council [passed](https://www.amazon.com/What-Justice-Demands-Israeli-Palestinian-Conflict/dp/168261798X) more resolutions targeting Israel than it has against any other member state, and by a wide margin — more than the rest of the world combined. More than North Korea, which starves is own people and enslaves them. More than Syria, a dictatorship that has used chemical weapons on its own people. More than Saudi Arabia, a medieval, Islamist monarchy. More than Iran, a theocracy that murders its own people in the streets. By focusing on Israel, the Human Rights Council not only damns a nation that actually respects human rights, it deflects attention from the actual crimes of such tyrannical regimes.

What lends the U.N.’s Human Rights Council a shred of legitimacy is the participation of a few better, freer member nations — principally, the United States. So it’s good that Trump administration has withdrawn.

But the problems of the Human Rights Council reflect the U.N.'s fundamental vice. A defining feature of the U.N. has been its policy of opening membership non-judgmentally to all nations, whether free or oppressive, peaceful or belligerent. This amoral neutrality is supposed to make evil regimes better. In fact, it enables and abets their violation of individual rights.

U.N. membership did not prevent the USSR from herding its citizens into forced-labor camps, murdering untold numbers of them, and invading other states. Nor China from crushing under its military boot pro-freedom demonstrators at Tiananmen Square and peaceful ideological dissenters. The list goes on.

And the U.N. has long provided a global stage for dictators and theocrats to justify and launder their crimes: Iran's Hassan Rouhani, Russia's Vladimir Putin, Cuba's Fidel Castro. Etc. By elevating such vicious tyrants to the dignity of statesmen, the U.N. gave them moral cover.

When Amb. [Nikki Haley](http://thehill.com/people/nimrata-nikki-haley) announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Rights Council, she said it was "not a retreat from our human rights commitments," but an affirmation of them.

True, it was a good step in the right direction: To be a member of the Human Rights Council is to serve as an accessory to its lies, injustices and crimes. So too is remaining in the U.N. To uphold the ideal of freedom, then, withdrawal from the U.N. should be a further goal.

But there’s even more the US should do to resolve resolve the contradictions in its foreign policy. Remember, it was just days ago that [President Trump](http://thehill.com/people/donald-trump) praised North Korea's Kim Jong Un as "very talented" and a leader who "loves his people." While Trump has been particularly effusive toward a number of authoritarians, it’s a longstanding problem that U.S. policy often cozies up with tyrannical regimes.

The Trump administration was right to withdraw from the U.N. Human Rights Council. But to truly uphold the principle of rights, the U.S. itself needs to take seriously the moral difference between freedom and tyranny. A start would be to recognize the vicious character of the dictators and tyrants whom the U.N. enables.