UN panel critical of US government for 'proliferation' of racism draws fire

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A U.N. panel that blamed recent racist violence in the United States on government “failure at the highest political level” is itself coming under criticism for hypocrisy and selective moral outrage.

The 18-member U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, responding to a rally in Charlottesville, Va., on Aug. 12 that left at least 19 injured and one counterprotester dead, said Wednesday the U.S. must “undertake concrete measures to address the root causes of the proliferation of such racist manifestations.”

The panel also took a swipe at U.S. figures who, while criticizing white nationalists and neo-Nazis, defended the American tradition of free speech.

The U.S. must “ensure that the rights to freedom of expression, association and peaceful assembly are not exercised with the aim of destroying or denying the rights and freedoms of others. [The U.S. must] provide the necessary guarantees so that such rights are not misused to promote racist hate speech and racist crimes.”

Critics charged that the panel expressed outrage over the U.S. handling of recent incidents but ignored far more chronic and acute violence and abuse around the world.

"The U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination's report that it is alarmed by recent protests in Charlottesville is precisely the reason the U.N. enjoys little support in this country," said Robert C. O'Brien, who served as a U.S. representative to the U.N. General Assembly under President George W. Bush.

"Instead of focusing on the 200,000 people in concentration camps in North Korea or the genocide of Christians in the Middle East or the recent murders of innocent Europeans by extremists, this U.N. committee wasted its time on 'alerting' the world to a fringe group that was roundly condemned by every politician in the United States from the president on down.

"The fact that this committee includes members from Russia, China, Burkina Faso and Algeria tells Americans just how little heed they should give its 'alerts.'"

Anne Bayefsky, director of the Touro Institute on Human Rights and the Holocaust, and president of Human Rights Voices, also criticized the U.N. panel.

"The 'urgent action' procedure on all forms of racial discrimination, that was invoked by the Committee for the United States, is intended to deal with 'problems requiring immediate attention,'" said Bayefsky, "but it has not been used by the committee for any other nation on earth in 2017 and only applied to five other nations at all in the last decade according to the committee's own website.

"The committee sounded a global alarm for the car-ramming attack in Charlottesville, but never Palestinians ramming their cars into Jews in Israel or Islamic extremists doing likewise anywhere in Europe," Bayefsky added. "The end result is another example of the notorious inequality of U.N.-based equality rights systems."