**It’s Time the UN Stopped Congratulating Kim Jong Un**

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Protocol has its uses, not least at the United Nations. But when it comes to lavishing on murderous tyrants the same pro forma felicitations accorded to the elected leaders of free nations, it's time for Secretary-General Antonio Guterres to clean up the act of the UN Protocol and Liaison Service -- which reports to him.

What's the problem? There are many problems, actually, and they stem from the UN's morally incontinent practice of doling out to all member states  -- whether totalitarian or democratic; North Korea or Costa Rica -- the same perquisites, including a lot of diplomatic swag for the most monstrous dictators on the planet.

Lest that sound too abstract, let's turn to one of the latest outrages. This cameo starts with a UN communique to war-wracked Syria, where last month the state news agency, SANA, reported that President Bashar al-Assad had just received "a cable of congratulations from United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on the occasion of Syria's independence day." According to the [SANA dispatch,](http://sana.sy/en/?p=104835) (boldface mine) Guterres in this cable "expressed his warmest congratulations to the Syrian people **and government** on this occasion."

For anyone even remotely familiar with the doings of Assad and the condition of Syria, that message sounds more than a tad out of touch. Assad is a despot who inherited power upon the death of his despotic father 17 years ago. During the first decade of his rule, operating as Iran's chief mascot in the Middle East, Bashar Assad presided over a terror-sponsoring state (a patron of the terrorist groups Hezbollah and Hamas), employed the help of North Korea in building a clandestine nuclear reactor with no evident purpose except to produce nuclear bomb fuel (the Al Kibar reactor, destroyed by an Israeli air strike in 2007) and -- with his secret police, torture chambers, dungeons and related atrocities -- oppressed his own countrymen so thoroughly and brutally that in 2011 they rebelled.

As we all know, Assad refused to give up power. He talked about elections, and offered a complete sham. He fought back, as head of a merciless tyranny. He has by now used everything from barrel bombs to chemical weapons against his fellow Syrians. In the UN's official protocol list, Assad has kept his place as Syria's official head of state -- a position he has retained at the cost of a war that has brought the deaths of more than 400,000 people, misery for millions of refugees, the rise of ISIS and the return of Russia to the Middle East as the weapons-bearing godfather of Damascus.

In this context, it was hard to believe that Guterres would send a message of "warmest congratulations" to Assad, whatever the topic. Surely this report from SANA was just another piece of propaganda from the Syrian regime?

Nope. As it turns out, the message was the real McCoy, an official message of congratulations from Guterres to Assad. We learned this from an April 24 UN press briefing, at which reporter Matthew Russell Lee, of Inner-City Press, [asked a UN spokesman](http://www.innercitypress.com/unvpress2wipo050117.html)if the Syrian news report was accurate, and further asked for the full text of the UN congratulatory cable.

The spokesman, effectively confirming that such a missive had indeed been sent, replied that it was not a "personalized" letter, but a standard message "that goes out to every Member State on their National Day":

It's a generic message. And I think it is about peace and, I think, you know, there...no one would disagree that, after more then six years of conflict, I think the Syrian people deserve peace.

That sounds nice. But this UN message, celebrated by Syria's state news agency [under the headline](http://sana.sy/en/?p=104835) "PRESIDENT AL-ASSAD RECEIVES CONGRATULATION CABLE FROM GUTERRES ON OCCASION OF INDEPENDENCE DAY," does nothing to bring peace. Rather, it offers a boost to Assad, an assurance -- never mind the chemical weapons and so forth -- that in the eyes of the UN he is the legitimate ruler of Syria.

Is Assad really a figure to whom the secretary-general should be sending any form of congratulations, whether personal or generic? What kind of "peace" does the UN secretary-general, or his protocol section, have in mind? Or was there, on the UN side, simply no thought at all?  Just how many letters does the UN bureaucracy grind out, in the name of the secretary-general, with no regard for whether the recipient is an elected head of state, or a butcher? And should the secretary-general perhaps conduct a review of such practices, given that his job as spelled out in the UN charter entails responsibility for such stuff as "chief administrative officer"?

These are questions that America's Mission to the UN might want to take up, as Ambassador Nikki Haley tries to insert into UN proceedings some basic standards of decency.

Not least, this UN protocol sideshow doesn't end with Syria. Curious about whether the UN sends out this same "generic" message of congratulations every year to, say, North Korean tyrant Kim Jong Un, on his country's national day, I asked the UN press office. They provided a copy of the generic text, and confirmed that, yes, the same message goes out to Kim.

The UN does not make the text of this letter readily available online (or if it does, neither I, nor the UN protocol office, nor the spokesman's office was able to discover a link). But here's the full text, which goes out to all member states over the name of the secretary-general (boldface, once again, is mine):

**NATIONAL DAY LETTER 2017**

Excellency,

I am pleased to extend **my warmest congratulations to the Government** and people of *[country name]* on the occasion of your National Day.

We are living through a time of great promise but also deep insecurity.  I began the year by issuing an appeal for peace around the world.  All that we strive for as a human family – dignity and justice, progress and prosperity – depends on peace.  These values are enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations and bind us together.

**In celebrating your country, I also recognize how, at a time of growing division around the world, the diversity of the United Nations strengthens our common work and affirms our common humanity.**

**As you mark this special day, I count on your country’s active engagement and contribution** to help build a stronger United Nations and **advance our shared efforts to ensure peace, development and human rights for all.**

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Apparently, it makes no difference to the UN Secretariat that Kim's regime is not part of any "shared" effort to "ensure peace, development and human rights for all."  Kim keeps power by way of reigning over a totalitarian party that occupies the cockpit of an erstwhile nation state. His methods include developing illicit nuclear missiles (in violation of  a heap of UN sanctions); holding Seoul hostage to North Korea's artillery; threatening South Korea, the U.S. and sundry others with nuclear strikes; and brutalizing and terrorizing his own countrymen to an extent described by the UN's own Commission of Inquiry as so horrifying that it is [without parallel in the contemporary world](https://pjmedia.com/claudiarosett/the-moral-obscenity-of-kims-north-korea/).

For anyone who values freedom, peace and all those other good things lumped into the apparently irrelevant UN Charter, there should be nothing to celebrate about the founding of North Korea. Conceived and backed by Stalin, staffed for 72 years by three generations of the Kim dynasty and dedicated to the enslavement of Koreans, North Korea is a horror at home and a menace abroad.

It is true that this contributes to the "diversity" of the UN -- which North Korea joined in 1991. It is a form of diversity that the UN would be well advised to dispense with.

The damning findings of the UN Commission of Inquiry into human rights abuses in North Korea were true, and important. For purposes of communicating to Kim where he really stands -- or where he ought to -- in the eyes of the UN, the commission's findings can only be undercut by the routine dispatch of letters from the UN Secretary-General (or his protocol office) that congratulate Kim and in effect reassure him, in writing, that in the eyes of the UN's top boss, he is the legitimate ruler of North Korea.

North Korea's National Day is Sept. 9. On that day, the UN protocol office is due, on schedule, to send the above letter to North Korea (just as it did last month to Bashar Assad), addressed to Kim ("Excellency"), and extending to his regime the warmest congratulations of Secretary-General Guterres. Unless, of course, Secretary-General Guterres, wielding the full majesty of his office, and actually paying attention to what goes out over his name, takes action now, to stop this routine.