# Danon at Turtle Bay

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For decades the UN has rightly been perceived by many as an organization irredeemably biased against Israel. Features of this bias include the 1975 resolution, later repealed, that equated Zionism with racism; the Durban conferences against “racism” that were nothing more than Israel-bashing fests under the auspices of the UN; the infamous “Article 7” that obligates the so-called UN Human Rights Council to single out Israel for censure three times a year.

But new winds are blowing at Turtle Bay, and Danny Danon, Israel’s ambassador to the UN, is riding them to a new horizon after being elected vice president of the General Assembly for next year.

The most dramatic change at the UN was the appointment of Nikki Haley as the US envoy to the UN. She has been an outspoken proponent of Israel in a number of UN forums, defending Israel’s ties to the Temple Mount in UNESCO, and fighting to redirect attention from Israel to Iran and other human rights abusers in the UNHRC. She has also helped block publication of a report by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia that referred to Israel as an apartheid state.

Another development was the appointment of Antonio Guterres as the UN secretary-general to replace Ban Ki-moon. Guterres has already proven to be intolerant of attacks against Israel. Just this week he announced that the UN had withdrawn support for a Palestinian women’s center named for a notorious terrorist, saying his organization would not support the “offensive” glorification of terrorism.

Danon has worked hard to take the utmost advantage of these changes, leveraging them to the maximum. Instead of giving up on the UN as irreversibly tainted, Danon has been active within its corridors to bring about change.

As he noted in an oped in The New York Times in December, the expectation from the UN is not that it become overnight an adamant advocate of the Jewish state. Rather, all that Israel expects is to be treated no differently from the 192 other member states.

Refusing to give up hope that the UN can live up to its own ideals, Danon has fought for representation and pushed to influence the organization from within. In September, at the opening of the 72nd Session of the General Assembly, he will begin his one-year term.

In May 2016, Danon become the first Israeli diplomat to chair the UNGA’s legal committee, the Sixth Committee, with 109 member states. He is the first Israeli to chair a permanent committee at the UN.

Danon’s success is proof that, with hard work and a refusal to lose hope, it is possible to bring about change. But there is much more work to be done. Together with Haley and Guterres, Danon should work to eliminate Agenda Item 7, which singles out Israel for perpetual censure.

Since 2007, Israel has been the only country whose alleged human rights abuses are regularly denounced in the framework of a single permanent item on the Human Rights Council’s agenda. Doing away with this item might not transform an organization heavily biased against Israel, but at least it would stop the practice of generating automatic condemnation of Israel.

Another important step would be for the UN Relief and Works Agency to change the way it defines refugees. Palestinians who fled in 1948 are the only refugees in the world who bequeath their special status to a fourth generation. Today millions of Palestinians are considered refugees, even though they were born far away from Israel decades after the state’s founding. By changing the definition of “who’s a Palestinian refugee” the UN can begin to treat Palestinians the same way it treats all other refugees.

Improving relations between Israel and the UN benefits both sides. Just as the UN can do much to eradicate unfair treatment of Israel in the international community, so too can Israel help the UN.

Ambassador Danon is spearheading a change in the UN’s relationship with Israel. His efforts are proof that, when truth is on your side, perseverance has the potential to pay off.