Ambassador Haley Needs to Dole Out Some 'Tough Love' to United Nations

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Critics of the United Nations are gaining ground in Washington. Proposals to defund and disengage from the U.N. have been put forward on Capitol Hill and by the Trump administration in its proposed budget.

As a longtime observer of, and participant in the U.N. representing the American business community, I’d like to offer some unsolicited advice to Ambassador [Nikki R. Haley](http://thehill.com/person/nikki-r-haley), the U.S. representative to the U.N., on how we could work to improve the global body.

The U.N. deserves a lot of the criticism being leveled at it. Many observers, myself included, acknowledge that parts of the U.N. system often suffer from poor management, an inability to efficiently set and meet priorities and the tendency to take an unbalanced view toward certain stakeholders.

This is evident in the organization’s attitude toward the private sector. There have indeed been positive experiences, such as in the U.N. 2030 Development Agenda, where the U.N. is reaching out to the private sector to meet commonly agreed goals of poverty reduction, environmental protection and better governance.

But too often, in many parts of the U.N. system, the business community is still regarded with suspicion, and its motives are called into question or criticized as a conflict of interest. With criticism of the U.N. on the rise, now is the time for the United States to push for effective reform. Here are four areas where the U.S. could exercise some “tough love” in the United Nations.

First, insist on good management. Financial resources are scarce, and we need to know that our taxpayer dollars are being used wisely. New U.N. Secretary General Antonio Guterres has pledged to make the organization leaner and more effective.

Work with him to increase the ability of the U.N. Office of Internal Oversight Services to act as a truly independent “inspector general” throughout the U.N. system, with direct reporting back to U.N. governing bodies authorized to take specific action on recommendations.

Second, demand more transparency and accountability. The U.N. has taken steps to open its doors to non-governmental entities, but much more needs to be done, particularly from the standpoint of the business community. Too often, the U.N. sets global norms and standards with little or no input from outside stakeholders, including the private sector.

This is unfortunate, especially given the extent to which business is looked to for funding, innovation and implementation in such areas as climate change, improved nutrition and better health care. In addition, some U.N. agencies, such as the World Health Organization, actively blacklist business organizations from even observing their activities. This damages the U.N.’s credibility and effectiveness.

Third, ensure the U.N. avoids redundancy and mission creep. While the U.N. plays a central role in global governance, it cannot and should not do everything or have the final say. United Nations negotiators are sometimes too eager to take up issues already being addressed elsewhere, like in global taxation, data and privacy issues, or intellectual property rights.

This not only wastes government time and money, it creates uncertainty and confusion for companies and everyone else. The U.S. should guide the U.N. and its specialized agencies to focus their resources on areas where they can add the most value and where they have a clear mandate.

One way to do this would be to develop stricter guidelines for voluntary contributions from member states, which are usually funds over and above assessed contributions for pet projects that often deviate from an agency’s mission.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, encourage the U.N. to partner with the private sector. Governments can’t do everything. The World Bank estimates that effectively tackling global problems of poverty, health, job creation and energy access will require trillions of dollars over the next 15 years, with much of that coming from the private sector in the form of project finance and foreign investment.

But this won’t happen if business views are sidelined or ignored. The U.S. should spur the U.N. to step up its partnerships with companies in such areas as innovation, infrastructure and investment.

Ambassador Haley should focus especially on U.N. agencies and bodies that have kept the business community in the dark or at arm’s length. Organizations such as the WHO and U.N. Human Rights Commission have drifted away from their core agendas and have enacted counterproductive restrictions on business — a key community which is keen to bring resources, expertise and implementation to advance their respective missions.

We should insist on inclusive and transparent governance in the U.N., with an open door for responsible actors from civil society, including the private sector.

The United Nations has made important progress, and it must continue to seek out new opportunities for collaboration that can improve lives and increase prosperity in the United States and around the world.  But none of this can happen if the United States is not at the table. The U.N. was in large part an American creation. It’s going to be up to us to try to fix it.