US Threatens to Replace UN Human Rights Body Over Anti-Israel Stance

June 15, 2017

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The Jerusalem Post

<http://www.jpost.com/Arab-Israeli-Conflict/US-threatens-to-replace-UN-human-rights-body-over-anti-Israel-stance-496924>

The United States has threatened to replace the United Nations Human Rights Council with an alternative group of nations, unless the 47-member body halted its anti-Israel bias and underwent a series of reforms.  
  
“We are either going to reform this thing and make it reflect what it should be reflecting or we will withdraw our support for it,” US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said on Wednesday in Washington.

Should the US pull out of the UNHRC it would “find other means that we can approach human rights issues on a multi-lateral basis with partners who see it the same way we do,” Tillerson told the House Foreign Affairs Committee.  
  
Rep. Francis Rooney (R-FL) asked Tillerson about US funding for international organizations in the fiscal 2018 budget, including the Geneva based UNHRC.

“I wish you would reconsider the $10 million you have in there for the UNHRC. That is on top of the $17.5 million that we have spent in the last few years to try to buy friendship with Israel. I will bet you a steak dinner that it is not going to work,” he said.  
  
Tillerson assured that Rooney that his office was examining its engagement with some of those insinuations, specifically the UNHRC, as he issued a number of strong statements about the organization.  
  
“We are looking at those one by one by one and really asking ourselves what is the cost benefit here.  In some areas we are either going to reform those or we are going to withdraw from them,” Tillerson said.  
  
“We are taking a very close look at what do we, the American people, get in return for this investment or this funding that we provide,” Tillerson said.  
  
“That is not a threat, but as a tool to use so they understand, this time this is a serious conversation. We need to get to a serious conclusion.  
  
“If you do not want to change, if you do not want to reform, that is fine, let us know and we will try a different approach.  
  
“The UNHRC is one that we are currently engaged in. [US] Ambassador [to the UN Nikki] Haley is directly engaged in,” Tillerson said.  
  
Haley spoke publicly about the possibility of a US pull out when visiting Geneva last week. Her office also issued a statement about it this week after learning the UNHRC might ask the International Court of Justice at The Hague to issue an advisory opinion on alleged Israeli human rights abuses toward Palestinians. She made a clear link between America's continued involvement in the council and its biased treatment of Israel.  
  
Last week a UNHRC spokesman told The Jerusalem Post that the US has played a very positive role in the UNHRC.  
  
"The United States has been a very valuable and constructive partner in the Human Rights Council, having spearheaded numerous important initiatives including those on Syria, North Korea, Sri Lanka, Iran, freedom of expression, LGBT rights, broadening space and addressing safety issues for civil society, and many more,” the spokesman said.   
  
“The Council would certainly benefit from such solid engagement in future from the United States,” the spokesman said.  
  
He added that, as a result of the US engagement with the council under the former Obama Administration, the body had focused less on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.  
  
“For example, only one out of 14 special sessions between 2010-2016 was devoted to this conflict in comparison to the six held between 2006-2009,” he said.  
  
It has also spent less time on Agenda Item 7, which is the mandated debate on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that the UNHRC must hold at every session.  
  
“The amount of time spent on Agenda Item 7 debates ("occupied Palestinian territory") has also decreased from 15% to 8% over this time frame,” he said.  
  
The UNHRC meets three times a year and is now holding its 35th session. It will hold its agenda Item debate on Monday.