**SOS: The UN Strikes Again**

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On Thursday, the General Assembly will elect fourteen new members of the UN's lead human rights body, the Human Rights Council. The 2006 resolution which established the 47-member Council promises that when choosing its top human rights policy-makers the General Assembly "shall take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto."

Throwing their hats into the ring are such human rights stalwarts as Libya, Angola, Malaysia, Qatar, Mauritania and Uganda.

There are less than 24 hours to go and Qatar and Uganda haven't bothered to make a pledge at all. But in the case of candidates Libya, Malaysia and Angola, written voluntary pledges came roaring in just yesterday. If you thought they dilly-dallied because they had nothing much to say about human rights, you would be wrong.

Here is some of what Libya has just pledged:

The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is among the countries that fulfil their obligations regarding respect for human rights and the rule of law....The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is fully committed to the promotion and protection of human rights principles...More than ever, the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya has paid great attention to human rights over the past 30 years...[T]he improvement of prisons' conditions is part of a national advanced programme that ensures the training of judicial police officers in respect of human rights...The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya offers judicial protection for human rights and freedoms...The Judicial System Act of 2006 provides...in particular: (a) The independence and neutrality of the judge;...The existing law on prisons in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya is considered one of the most modern laws in the world...no individual is accepted into prison without a judicial decision.

And here is some of what Libya mysteriously neglected to mention, according to the 2009 State Department Human Rights Report on Libya:

"Security personnel reportedly routinely tortured and abused detainees and prisoners during interrogations or as punishment... The law sanctioned corporal punishments such as amputation and flogging... Security forces had the authority to sentence without trial, particularly in cases involving the political opposition... Mu'ammar al-Qadhafi may interfere in the administration of justice by altering court judgments, replacing judges, or manipulating the appeal system... In a March 2008 speech, echoing statements in a 2007 speech in which he declared that all those who did not practice Islam were "losers," al-Qadhafi said the Christian Bible and the Jewish Torah are forgeries and the original versions mentioned the Prophet Muhammad. Al-Qadhafi stated in a 2007 interview that "Jews will go extinct because everyone hates them."... Homosexual acts are a criminal offense punishable by three to five years in prison."

Libya also made this solemn pledge:

"The Libyan Arab Jamahiriya pays great attention to women and children,...This consideration stems primarily from Islamic Sharia, which dignifies women, elevates their status and promotes their rights."

Well actually….here are a few facts they left out:

"Women and girls suspected of violating moral codes were detained indefinitely without being convicted or after having served a sentence and without the right to challenge their detention before a court. They were held in "social rehabilitation" facilities, in some cases because they had been raped and then ostracized by their families. The government stated that a woman was free to leave a rehabilitation home when she reached "legal age" (18 years), consented to marriage, or was taken into the custody of a male relative. ..[A]uthorities transferred most women to these facilities against their will..." (US State Department Country Report of Human Rights Practices in Libya, 2009)

And then there was candidate Angola. It told UN members that its constitution "establishes a democratic state of law" and "is…comprehensive and recognizes… inalienable…rights and freedoms." They pledged that "the Government of Angola will…encourage…Mainstreaming of human rights into the United Nations syste…; the engagement of non-governmental organizations as a positive and important element of dialogue in the work of the Council."

Oops. Somehow omitted:

"government security forces tortured, beat, and otherwise abused persons...The government arrested and harassed NGO workers... [A]uthorities arrested, harassed, and intimidated journalists... [T]he government monitored Internet chat rooms and Web sites...Domestic violence against women, including spousal abuse, was common and pervasive...Female inmates informed...that prison guards regularly raped them…"(US State Department Country Report of Human Rights Practices in Angola, 2009)

Not to be outdone, Malaysia got off to a good start by letting everyone know what they thought of women: "If elected, we will: actively support international action to advance the rights of vulnerable groups such as women, children and the disabled."

It then crowed:

Malaysia is actively seeking to promote and protect human rights...Laws that are archaic and no longer relevant may be repealed...[T]he political system guarantees a voice for all....[E]thnic groups are given the opportunity to participate at every level of political and decision making process...Our commitments and pledges:....Continuing fostering meaningful and productive engagement between the government machinery and civil society.

Left on the cutting-room floor:

"The government restricted freedom of expression and intimidated journalists into practicing self censorship.... Religious authorities, with the consent of a Shari'a court, arrested and detained members of groups deemed "deviationist" in order to "rehabilitate deviants" and return them to the "true path of Islam."...[O]fficials often engaged in corrupt practices with impunity... Violence against women remained a problem... [L]aws against sodomy and "carnal intercourse against the order of nature" exist and were enforced..." (US State Department Country Report of Human Rights Practices in Malaysia, 2009)

On the off-chance you're worried that any of these omissions (or fabrications) will have the slightest impact on members of the UN General Assembly or affect the chances of these countries being elected to the Council, allow me to put your mind at rest. Every one of them will be elected. They will then proudly take their seat alongside other current members like China, Cuba and Saudi Arabia - and the United States - because the Obama administration thinks this is the right place to be if you care about human rights. It gets sadder. If you're an American taxpayer, you're picking up 22% of the tab.