UN Human Rights Council? UN Human Wrongs Council!

July 3, 2015

By David Harris

The Huffington Post

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-harris/un-human-rights-council-u_b_7723858.html>

The 47-member UN Human Rights Council in Geneva just voted to assail Israel because of the Hamas-triggered war in the summer of 2014.

That's right, assail Israel, not Hamas.

There will be those silver-tongued diplomats from Europe and elsewhere who will try to explain that the text could have been worse, as if this should be a source of gratification.

No doubt, the text could have been still worse - it always can be - but that's not the point. The point is it shouldn't have happened in the first place.

But then again, this is the inaptly named UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). When it comes to Israel, these things are so routine they barely raise an eyebrow in the international community.

After all, hard as it may be to believe, tiny, democratic Israel has been the target of more country-specific resolutions at the UNHRC than all other nations combined.

Think about it for just a moment. There are 193 UN member states, including some of the worst human rights violators in modern history.

Yet many, if not most, get off scot-free. Even more, they get to pile on Israel, while avoiding the UNHRC's scrutiny and wrath.

Why?

Actually, the answer is really quite simple - and telling.

It's, above all, about numbers. The UN is nothing more or less than the collective expression of its member states.

So, let's take the example of an anti-Israel resolution.

Right off the bat, the Palestinians can count on the automatic support of the 21 voting members of the Arab League (if it's the entire UN General Assembly, or the league's representatives in the case of a smaller body like the UNHRC).

So, too, with the 57-nation Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

There won't be any dissent coming from this group, irrespective of how biased, one-sided, or outrageous the anti-Israel text might be. Group solidarity counts for far more.

And then comes the 120-member Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Suffice it to say that the current chairman is Iran and Venezuela is on deck.

That's close to two-thirds of the UN membership, providing a decisive majority for any anti-Israel text.
But, alas, it doesn't end there.

In some ways, the most problematic voting can come from the 28-member European Union and those nations who tend to follow this group.

After all, these are democratic countries that have relations with Israel and shouldn't necessarily be in lockstep with the Arab League, OIC, or NAM.

And, true, there are times when, voting as a bloc, the EU will abstain on an Israel-related matter, for which they congratulate themselves on their courage, even if sitting on the fence can be contradicted by the facts on the ground.

And indeed, every so often, the EU won't achieve a consensus, in which case individual nations will go their own way, sometimes variously ending up in the "yes," "no," and "abstain" columns.

But today in Geneva, the five EU countries all voted together - and voted "yes."

While such a vote from Ireland or France may not be a complete surprise to observers of the world body, a comparable vote by Germany, the Netherlands, and U.K. is more noteworthy - and deeply disappointing.

Let's be frank. It bespeaks, above all, political expediency, not political courage. Standing with Israel yields few benefits and, potentially, many costs. Conversely, standing against Israel yields few costs and, potentially, many benefits.

Apropos, when France wonders why Israel is opposed to initiatives from Paris in the UN on the peace process, this vote, and some that preceded it (e.g., at the UN Security Council, World Health Organization, and UNESCO) offer an answer.

Paris cannot present itself to Israel as fair-minded and balanced, on the one hand, and then, when push comes to shove on a UN vote, go in the opposite direction.

Once again, as in the case of last summer's vote on the Hamas-Israel war at the UN Human Rights Council, only one country out of 47 stood tall, defended the truth, and displayed courage - the United States. (Had Australia and Canada also been members, they doubtless would have joined with the U.S.)

Five others thankfully abstained - Ethiopia, Kenya, Macedonia, Paraguay, and, notably, India, which had hitherto voted with the automatic majority on Israel-related measures.

And so, by a vote of 41 to 1, with five abstentions, the UNHRC adopted yet another measure against the one and only liberal democracy in the Middle East.

In doing so, it showed that it couldn't - or wouldn't - distinguish between a terrorist entity, Hamas, calling for Israel's destruction - and Israel, a UN member state seeking to defend itself against the onslaught of cross-border missiles, mortars, and tunnels.

Shame!

Of course, what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander, or at least that's the way it's supposed to be.

Let's see what happens when other democratic countries, faced with increasing threats from Hamas-like foes, realize that fighting back against enemies who use civilians as human shields, and hospitals and mosques as weapons depots, isn't all that clean, neat, and simple.

Will they, too, face commissions of inquiry and one-sided resolutions from the automatic majority that circle the wagons around dangerous actors like Hamas, Iran, and Venezuela?

But, frankly, what's most troublesome of all about this vote, and the countless hours of discussion, debate, and decision that led up to it, is that it denied genuine victims of human rights abuses the attention and protection they deserve.

That's what the UNHRC is supposed to be doing - giving voice to the voiceless, protecting the defenseless, shining the spotlight on the perpetrators, calling them to account.

But how can it, when it is pathologically obsessed with Israel, numerically captive to those ready to protect the guilty parties, and willing to throw truth to the wind?

No, tragically, the UNHRC, doesn't begin to live up to its name, far from it.

And those who truly care about the defense of human dignity and human rights should be the first to express their outrage at this daily travesty.