

THE AMERICAN JEWISH COMMITTEE

STATEMENT ON UNITED NATIONS REFORM

The American Jewish Committee was in the forefront of non-governmental organizations that welcomed and supported the adoption of the United Nations Charter in 1945. Indeed, the AJC contributed to the drafting of human rights provisions of that Charter. AJC also played a particularly active role in the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the creation of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights.

We remain fully committed to the founding and noble purposes and principles of the United Nations.

Unfortunately, over the years the world body has too often failed to live up to the principles enshrined in its Charter. Inefficiency and lack of accountability impede the UN from carrying out its core missions. Programs and activities face little scrutiny and continue long after they outlive their usefulness. The world's worst human rights violators sit on – and even chair – the UN Human Rights Commission. Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East, has been singled out for censure and institutional bias for decades.

As the Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change (UN document A/59/565) suggests, the UN faces new challenges, unforeseen by the founders of the organization 60 years ago. Today, entire countries and continents are ravaged by poverty, the AIDS pandemic and other diseases – with severe human, political and security consequences.

International peace and security are imperiled by the rise in global terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Terrorism, as evidenced in the recent attacks in London, Israel, and Egypt, is one of the greatest challenges facing the international community today, and must be rejected in all its form and manifestations, irrespective of the declared cause. We fully subscribe to Secretary-General Kofi Annan's recent definition, that "the killing of innocent civilians or non-combatants, regardless of one's cause, is terrorism pure and simple." Based on this definition, the General Assembly should adopt a comprehensive convention on terrorism during its next session. Similarly, the world body must redouble its efforts to halt the proliferation of WMD and the danger of such weapons falling into the hands of rogue states and terrorist organizations.

In order to meet these new global challenges, the UN must undergo significant changes. The American Jewish Committee therefore supports fundamental reform of the UN that will enable it to fulfill its vital responsibilities – including the facilitation of conflict prevention and resolution, the protection of human rights, the alleviation of economic and social inequities, and the provision of humanitarian assistance in crises. This reform should encompass the main organs of the UN:

- We support a reform of the Security Council that would enhance its legitimacy as the organ responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, and make it more representative of the new international realities.
- The General Assembly should undergo changes that would rationalize and streamline its agenda, to enable it to reclaim its validity as the main deliberative organ of the organization.
- The Economic and Social Council has never lived up to the expectations placed upon it by the founders of the UN; it should be subject to changes, both structural and conceptual, that would enhance its relevance and effectiveness.
- We support the recommendation that the highly politicized Commission on Human Rights be replaced by a smaller Human Rights Council, which would consist of member states that have a solid record on human rights issues.
- Finally yet importantly, the Secretariat needs to undergo a reform that would ensure accountability, transparency, and good governance.

Nowhere is the UN's deviation from its basic principles more evident than in the manner in which the organization treats the State of Israel. For more than three decades, the UN has displayed what can only be described as an obsession with Israel, singling it out and, at one point, even calling into question its right to exist (resolution 3379 of 1975, equating Zionism with racism, which was revoked in 1991).

Despite some positive changes in recent years, such as the admission of Israel as a full but temporary member of the West European and Others Group in New York, the institutional bias against Israel persists. Israel is the only UN member not fully included in the regional grouping system, excluding it from important decision-making processes and rendering it ineligible to hold rotating positions. The General Assembly adopts each year more than 20 anti-Israel resolutions that hinder rather than advance the cause of peace. The Commission on Human Rights dedicates a disproportionate share of its agenda to censuring Israel - the only country singled out for scrutiny under an exclusive agenda item - while ignoring massive violations of human rights in other parts of the world.

Perhaps most egregious are the entities within the UN – such as the Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinians, and the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices – whose specific mandate is to promote the Palestinian cause against Israel, thereby perpetuating the conflict and undermining peace-making efforts. These entities expend precious UN resources that could be dedicated to the real needs of Palestinians, such as the improvement of living conditions in areas under the responsibility of the Palestinian Authority.

We applaud the current efforts of the United States, the UN Secretary General and others to reform the UN system, but we firmly believe that there can be no real reform unless it rectifies the pervasive and corrosive institutional bias against the State of Israel. As long as the lofty principles enshrined in the UN charter are violated with regard to one member state, they remain unfulfilled. We urge an end to the UN's long-standing discrimination against Israel.

We recognize the complexities of UN reform, and the possibility that even substantial alterations in the architecture of the world body will not eliminate the natural obstacles to efficiency and harmony inherent in a diverse assembly of political systems and national interests and perspectives. However, to break down those obstacles and forge a common purpose from diversity and competing interests requires a stronger and more credible, transparent, and efficient United Nations. These are the ultimate goals of UN reform as the world body marks its 60th anniversary, and they have the support of the American Jewish Committee.

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