

The New York Times

United in Ignominy

By **RON PROSOR** MARCH 31, 2015

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations is celebrating its 70th anniversary this year. It was intended to be a temple of peace, but this once great global body has been overrun by the repressive regimes that violate human rights and undermine international security.

In 1949, when the United Nations admitted Israel as a member state, it had 58 member countries and about half had a democratic orientation. Today, the landscape of the organization has changed drastically. From 51 member states at its founding in 1945, the institution has grown to 193 members — fewer than half of which are democracies.

The very nations that deny democratic rights to their people abuse the United Nations' democratic forums to advance their interests. The largest of these groups comprises members from the 120-member-strong bloc known as the Non-Aligned Movement. Since 2012, the bloc has been chaired by Iran, which has used its position to bolster its allies and marginalize Israel.

In March, the United Nations closed the annual meeting of its Commission on the Status of Women by publishing a report that effectively singled out just one country for condemnation: Israel. The commission apparently had nothing to say about the Sudanese girls who are subjected to female genital mutilation. It also had nothing to say about the Iranian women who have been punished for crimes of “adultery” by stoning. These oversights may have something to do with the fact that both Iran and Sudan sit on the 45-member commission.

Then there is the United Nations Human Rights Council (the body that replaced the Commission on Human Rights in 2006). Its membership includes Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Venezuela — nations where you risk life and liberty if you express dissenting opinions. Yet these governments stand in judgment on the rest of us.

In 2007, Sudan chaired a committee overseeing human rights — even as its president, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, was being investigated for crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity in Darfur, for which the International Criminal Court later issued arrest warrants. Saudi Arabia — a regime notorious for public executions and floggings like that, most recently, of the blogger Raif Badawi — sits on the Human Rights Council, despite regularly receiving the worst possible ratings on civil liberties and political rights from the independent watchdog Freedom House.

In 2013, Iran was elected to the committee responsible for disarmament — even as it continued its nuclear expansion, support for terrorism and the destruction of Israel. Last year, an Iranian served as a vice chair of the General Assembly’s legal committee, an inexplicable choice given that Iranian citizens are routinely denied due process and fair trials.

Knowing this history, perhaps we shouldn’t be surprised that, in the 2014-15 session alone, the General Assembly adopted about 20 resolutions critical of Israel, while the human rights situations in Iran, Syria and North Korea merited just one condemnation apiece. Day after day, member states turn a blind eye to the most deplorable crimes.

Iran? Just one hostile resolution for a nation that, on average, executes citizens at a rate of two a day for “crimes” that include homosexuality, apostasy and the vague offense of being an “enemy of God.”

North Korea? Just one negative resolution even though it has imprisoned more than 200,000 citizens, throws children into forced labor camps and subjects its population to food shortages and famine as a result of government policies.

Syria? Again, just one resolution for a government that has pursued a war against its own people that has caused the deaths of at least 220,000 men, women and children — many by torture, starvation, chemical weapons and barrel bombs dropped on markets and schools.

Christians now number among the world’s most persecuted religious groups in Muslim countries, yet this human rights crisis is almost completely ignored by the United Nations. Instead, Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East and an area in the region where the Christian population is actually growing, often seems to be the only nation the United Nations cares about.

Nowhere is anti-Israel bias more obvious than in the Geneva-based Human Rights Council. The council addresses the human rights abuses of all countries in the world under a program known as Agenda Item 4. That is, all countries but one. Israel is the only nation that is singled out for criticism by virtue of a special program, known as Agenda Item 7. A result, according to the Geneva-based monitoring group UN Watch, is that more than 50 percent of all condemnatory resolutions are directed at the Jewish state.

Following last summer’s conflict in Gaza, the Human Rights Council established a Commission of Inquiry and selected William Schabas, a Canadian law professor, to chair the investigation. In February, Mr. Schabas was forced to resign after documents came to light revealing that, in 2012, he had done consulting work for the Palestine Liberation Organization. Surprisingly, this fact slipped Mr. Schabas’s mind during his vetting process.

It was clear from the outset that Mr. Schabas was not an impartial arbiter since he had a record of public statements suggesting that Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and the former president, Shimon Peres, should face trial at the International Criminal Court. When Israel protested, however, the United Nations ignored it.

I am often asked how I can stand the tide of hatred aimed at Israel. Our response to the United Nations' accusations is to speak tirelessly for those who are denied a voice in most of the Middle East — women, minorities, the L.G.B.T. community — and to fight daily efforts by totalitarian regimes to undermine democratic societies. Based on the fact that Israel is a thriving society, I believe we are winning.

Later this year, chairmanship of the Non-Aligned Movement will transfer to Venezuela, Iran's ally. For the foreseeable future, we can expect more of the same.

The problem with the United Nations is that the leaders of many of its member states do not rule with the consent of the governed. Instead, they use the body as a forum to deflect attention from their own ruthless rule. In so doing, they turn a stage for courageous statecraft into a tragic theater of the absurd.

Ron Prosor is Israel's ambassador to the United Nations.

A version of this op-ed appears in print on April 1, 2015, in The International New York Times.

Online Version: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/01/opinion/united-in-ignominy.html?smid=fb-share&_r=0