

THE HYPOCRISY OF U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS DAY

Each year the United Nations commemorates Human Rights Day on December 10. It is pathetically hypocritical that the U.N. should do so. Observes U.S. Permanent Representative to the U.N. Jeane Kirkpatrick: "No aspect of U.N. affairs has been more perverted by politicization in the last decade than have its human rights activities." The disproportionate amount of time spent in castigating such noncommunist regimes as Chile and Guatemala, whose human rights records have actually improved, while paying virtually no attention to the plight of tens of thousands dying as a result of Communist aggression in Afghanistan, Kampuchea, and Vietnam, exposes the double standard that has eroded the U.N.'s moral credibility on human rights. Indeed, not only has the U.N. done little to improve the plight of the world's oppressed, it has arguably worsened the situation. Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights Elliot Abrams claims that "on balance, the U.N. has done more harm than good in the field of human rights."

During the past General Assembly, as throughout its history, the U.N. has been predictably selective in its expressions of outrage, castigating countries whose citizens are allowed to emigrate and enjoy freedom of the press, while remaining silent about the oppressed populations of such countries as Cuba, the Soviet Union, Romania, Poland, North Korea, and Mainland China.

This selectivity of concern is matched only by the intemperate language of most human rights resolutions passed in the General Assembly, UNESCO, and other U.N. bodies. Carl Gershman, Counsellor to Ambassador Kirkpatrick, notes that a majority of those resolutions are extremist and vindictive, Soviet-inspired, with no genuine concern for human suffering. Resolution 37/88 C, for example, passed on Human Rights Day 1982, "declares once more that Israel's grave breaches of the Geneva Convention [on the West Bank] are war crimes and an affront to humanity." (The vote was 112 in favor, 21 abstaining, and only 2 against--Israel and the U.S.) Never mind the fact that West Bank Arabs have more civil rights than citizens of any Arab country; never mind, too, that Israel has brought unprecedented prosperity to that area. Meanwhile, no one accuses Syria for its ruthless massacre of some 10,000 unarmed inhabitants of the town of Hama in February of 1983. No resolutions, moreover, have ever been presented in the U.N. to condemn the Soviet Union for defying the 1925 Geneva Protocol and the 1972 Biological Weapons Convention by chemically killing thousands of civilians, including small children, in Afghanistan, Laos, and Kampuchea.

Throughout its history, the U.N. has ignored the most blatant human rights violations--outright cases of near genocide: in Indonesia against the Chinese in the 1960s; in Nigeria against the Ibos in 1966-1968; in Pakistan against the Bengalis in 1971; in Burundi against the Hutus in 1972-1973; in Iran against the Kurds in 1975-1977; in Idi Amin's Uganda against helpless civilians in 1977-1978; in Nicaragua against the Miskitoes in 1981-1982; in Assam, India, against the Sikhs in 1983.

In fact, the U.N. goes beyond silence. It actually has made available funds to regimes that systematically violate human rights: Nicaragua and Angola (\$7.5 million each since 1980); Ethiopia (\$46 million since 1980); even Vietnam (\$45.3 million since 1980--\$27.1 million in 1982 alone). Never mind Vietnam's ruthless repression of the population in "reeducation" camps, the export of some 45,000 workers to the USSR allegedly to pay "debts" owed by Vietnam to the Soviet Union, and a total absence of civil and political freedoms. The U.N., moreover, is continuing to fund so-called national liberation movements, which in fact are terrorist groups, such as the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Southwest African People's Organization (SWAPO). Financial support for these groups, whose avowed intention is the violent overthrow of U.N. member states, seems hardly in line with the U.N. Charter's commitment to uphold the cause of human rights.

U.S. lawmakers are beginning to show serious concern about this state of affairs. Thus, the State Department Appropriations Act of 1984 and 1985, which became law on November 22, 1983, demands a review of the U.N.'s performance. The Act expresses the desire of a bipartisan majority of Congress that the U.N. take steps to uphold the provisions of its own Charter. In light of its performance on human rights, Congress may well decide that the U.S. portion (25 percent) of the \$28 million spent by the U.N. directly on human rights activities would be better spent on private institutions (for example, Freedom House), which publicize and promote the cause of millions whose suffering should truly be remembered on December 10.

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For further information:

"Chemical Warfare in Southeast Asia and Afghanistan," U.S. Department of State Special Report No. 98, March 22, 1982.

Juliana Geran Pilon, "The U.N. & Human Rights: The Double Standard," Heritage Foundation Backgrounder No. 183, May 11, 1982.

Amnesty International Report 1983

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1982, U.S. Department of State, February 1983.