

Press Releases: Key Outcomes of U.S. Priorities at the UN Human Rights Council's 37th Session

Fact Sheet
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At the 37th Human Rights Council session in Geneva, February 26-March 23, the U.S. addressed urgent human rights situations around the world. This session brought attention to human rights issues in Iran, Syria, North Korea, Burma, Cambodia and South Sudan, among others. Acting Assistant Secretary of State Molly Phee delivered our national statement on February 28, underscoring the U.S. commitment to human rights, as well as our continued concerns about the Council's disproportionate focus on Israel and our commitment to reforming the Council. The United States introduced a resolution on South Sudan that the Council adopted with broad cross-regional support. Our active engagement on all other Council actions allowed the U.S. to protect critical legal and policy equities and achieve successful outcomes. In addition, through national and joint statements, the United States addressed human rights situations in China, Russia, Cuba, Venezuela, the DRC, Egypt, Turkey, Burundi, Azerbaijan, the Maldives, Vietnam, and Bahrain.

Supporting Israel: The United States worked closely with Israel and other partners to combat the institutionalized bias against Israel both by opposing Agenda Item 7, the only Council agenda item focused on a single country, and by voting against every resolution introduced under Item 7. Australia joined in voting against all Item 7 resolutions, while many other partners changed votes to either vote no or abstain. This session demonstrated the largest shift in votes towards more abstentions and no votes on Israel related resolutions since the creation of the HRC.

Standing up for the Integrity of UN Human Rights Mechanisms: The United States voted against a China-led resolution on **mutually beneficial cooperation**, which sought to weaken international human rights frameworks by demanding that governments be "respected" (i.e. not have their human rights records criticized) and suggesting that governments could agree on "win-win" exceptions to human rights concerns. In a strong explanation of vote, the United States underscored that "feel good" language about mutually beneficial cooperation is intended to benefit autocratic states at the expense of

individuals whose human rights and fundamental freedoms we should all respect.

Iran: The United States played a key role in garnering support for the resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur. The United States also read, on behalf of a group of 27 countries, a joint statement addressing the recent crackdown in Iran.

North Korea: The United States supported a resolution renewing the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, condemned the ongoing systematic and widespread human rights violations and abuses, called for accountability, and voiced ongoing support for monitoring and documentation efforts by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Syria: The United States supported an urgent debate on the dire situation in eastern Ghouta, which culminated in a resolution condemning the violations of the ceasefire. The United States also co-sponsored the resolution renewing the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry on Syria, which condemned the violations and abuses of human rights and violations of international humanitarian law throughout Syria, primarily by the Assad regime, including the use of chemical weapons, abuse of detainees, and denial of humanitarian aid.

South Sudan: The United States led a resolution to renew the mandate of the Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan for another year to collect and preserve evidence that can be used in future judicial efforts, including the AU Hybrid Court for South Sudan. We worked closely with South Sudan, members of the African Group, and other member states to ensure the text was adopted by consensus. South Sudan's support for the resolution reaffirmed its commitment to continue cooperating with the Commission and UN bodies and mechanisms.

Burma: The United States co-sponsored an EU-led resolution to renew the mandate of the Special Rapporteur and support the work of other special procedures, including the Fact Finding Mission, which are invaluable in investigating and highlighting the human rights situation in Burma. The resolution was adopted following a vote called by China.

Cambodia: The United States joined 44 other countries in supporting New Zealand's joint statement highlighting the decline in civil and political rights in Cambodia in the run up to national elections scheduled for July 29. The joint statement noted that an electoral process from which the main democratic opposition party is arbitrarily excluded cannot be considered genuine or legitimate.

Other Country Situations: The United States co-sponsored priority resolutions that renewed mandates on **Burma** and **North Korea**, as well as a resolution drawing attention to the human rights situations in **Georgia**, including the Russian-occupied territories of Georgia. We supported cooperative resolutions on **Libya** and **Mali**. The United States also delivered a statement supporting the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' engagement in **Yemen**,

Georgia, Afghanistan, and Haiti. Additionally, the United States joined joint statements highlighting serious concerns regarding the human rights situations in **Cambodia, Maldives, and Sri Lanka.**

Development Resolutions: The United States worked actively to remove trade-related language from resolutions on development, and to ensure that all resolutions that touch on development make clear that states may not use their lack of development or related concerns to excuse a failure to uphold their human rights obligations or commitments. We re-stated our long-standing opposition to recognizing a “right to development.”

Thematic Issues: The United States co-sponsored resolutions on **freedom of religion or belief, good governance,** the prevention of **genocide,** the rights of **minorities** and of persons with **disabilities,** and the impact of corruption on **torture,** among others. The United States also opposed a cynical Russia-led resolution on “integrity of the judicial system,” which failed to address issues of judicial independence, and inaccurately reflected aspects of international law.

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