



May 11, 2017

Ambassador Nikki Haley
Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations
U.S. Mission to the United Nations
799 United Nations Plaza
New York, NY 10017

Dear Ambassador Haley,

As representatives of organizations committed to global leadership by the United States and the advancement of human rights and democracy, we write to request a meeting with you to discuss new strategies to reform the UN Human Rights Council and ensure that U.S. engagement with the Council advances universal values and our nation's interests worldwide.

We appreciate the substantial attention you have already devoted to human rights challenges as Permanent Representative of the U.S. to the UN, particularly during your presidency of the Security Council in April, when you highlighted the many areas of the Council's work in which human rights plays an important role. We also noted your announcement at the Council on Foreign Relations that you intend to address the 35th session of the Human Rights Council which begins on June 6 in Geneva.

In our view, the upcoming Human Rights Council session presents the U.S., as a uniquely influential member of the Council, with an important opportunity to begin to tackle a number of serious challenges. In particular, we share your convictions that States with particularly poor human rights records should not become members of the Human Rights Council and that the Council's pervasive anti-Israel bias directly undercuts its credibility and its other achievements. We would like to discuss with you how to make progress in countering these practices.

As a first step, the U.S. should continue its membership on the Council. U.S. engagement with the Council allows it to lead by example, and to engage America's allies in efforts to reform the body's practices surrounding elections of its members and its treatment of Israel. American leadership at the Council also has been instrumental in putting a number of vital issues into the spotlight, and more sustained engagement by the U.S. could help improve it so that it can serve an even more effective role. In contrast, during the years when the U.S. was neither a member of the Council nor seriously engaged with it, from 2006-2009, the Council's performance was at its

worst, both with respect to addressing the world's worst violators and with respect to its anti-Israel bias. A U.S. withdrawal from the Council would invite it to return to such practices, which will in no way advance U.S. interests. Specifically, such an action would be likely to result in the remaining members of the Council unfairly targeting Israel to an even greater degree.

Moreover, at the upcoming Human Rights Council session, the U.S. has an opportunity to show leadership in bringing international scrutiny to bear on several particularly grave human rights situations, including in Syria, Ukraine (including Russian-occupied Crimea), Eritrea and Belarus. The Human Rights Council's attention to these situations has ensured that the United Nations trains a spotlight on and condemns many of the worst rights violators. For example, the independent Commission of Inquiry on Syria created by the Council's resolutions on this country situation has aided the U.S. and its allies immeasurably in countering the Syrian regime's defenders both in Geneva and at the Security Council in New York. Continued U.S. leadership at the Human Rights Council can ensure that this important work endures with respect to Syria, as well as other key countries, such as North Korea and Iran, that are not on the Council's June agenda, but which the Council addresses at other sessions during the year.

What is certain is that the departure of the U.S. from the Human Rights Council would only result in worse, and perhaps even pernicious, outcomes from the only global intergovernmental body addressing some of the world's most pressing human rights challenges. In particular, increased attention to Israel by the Council could result in hostile initiatives and resolutions with wide-ranging consequences throughout the United Nations and in other international fora, further complicating efforts to advance U.S. objectives through multilateral cooperation.

The Human Rights Council is in need of reform, and we share your objective to improve the body. At the same time, we remain convinced that a U.S. withdrawal from the Council will do more to harm our national interests than working from within. We thus urge you to uphold U.S. leadership while redoubling efforts to improve the Council's membership, fairness and credibility.

Thank you for your leadership on these issues. We hope it will be possible to meet in person before the 35th session of the Council convenes.

Sincerely,

Michael Abramowitz, President, Freedom House
Rob Berschinski, Senior Vice President, Policy, Human Rights First
Ty Cobb, Director, HRC Global, Human Rights Campaign
Felice Gaer, Director, Jacob Blaustein Institute for the Advancement of Human Rights
Greg Scarlatou, Executive Director, Committee for Human Rights in North Korea (HRNK)
Maran Turner, Executive Director, Freedom Now
Chris Whately, Executive Director, United Nations Association of the United States of America
Peter Yeo, President, Better World Campaign