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UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL TAKES SIDES AGAINST ISRAEL ON GAZA

The UN Human Rights Council, focusing its first special session (July 5-6) on Gaza, has adopted a set of one-sided demands aimed solely against Israel. A majority of the Council members ignored the rocket attacks from Gaza against Israeli towns and, under the pretext of protecting human rights, directed its criticism at Israel's self-defense measures. Darfur, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the sites of other human-rights crises have not attracted the attention of the "reformed" Council. Its actions in the first few weeks of its operation demonstrate an unbalanced preoccupation with Israel and further marginalize the UN's role in the field of human rights.

AJIRI Report #6 described the decision of the Human Rights Council at its first session to place the Israeli/Palestinian conflict on its long-term agenda. Having adjourned its regular session on June 30, the Council reconvened in special session to adopt a resolution, sponsored by 14 members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference *plus Cuba*, which **"expressed grave concern at the violations of the human rights of the Palestinian People,"... "demands that Israel ... end its military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory ... and refrain from imposing collective punishment on Palestinian civilians,"... "urges Israel...to immediately release the arrested Palestinian ministers, members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and other officials, as well as all other arrested Palestinian civilians" and "requests the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner to undertake an urgent visit to the Occupied Palestinian Territory and to report on the Israeli human rights violations there."**

The July 6 resolution was adopted by a vote of 29 to 11, with 5 abstentions and 2 absences. The vote on this resolution was similar to the vote of June 30, which had placed the Israeli/Palestinian conflict on the Council's long-term agenda.

Voting "yes" were **13 members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference**, plus **Argentina, Brazil, China, Cuba, Ecuador, Ghana, Guatemala, India, Mauritius, Philippines, Peru, Russian Federation, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Uruguay, and Zambia.**

Voting "no" were the **7 members of the EU plus Canada, Japan, Romania, and Ukraine.**

Abstaining were **Cameroon, Mexico, Nigeria, South Korea, and Switzerland.** **Djibouti and Gabon** were absent.

The statements delivered in explanation of vote provide a flavor of the meeting and of the cross-currents that cause some delegations to offer explanations of votes that do not truly justify the vote that they cast.

Finland declared that the **EU** would vote against the text because **it had failed to “treat the parties in a more balanced manner and to call immediately for the unconditional release of the Israeli soldier, and to call on the Palestinian leadership to cease its Qassam rocket fire on Israeli territory.”** **Canada**, similarly, said that the draft resolution “did not present a balanced approach” in that it “concentrated almost exclusively on Israel” and “did not call on the Palestinian Authority to refrain from rocket fire, among others.” **Japan** said the text was “one-sided and not balanced.”

As noted, the only Western member to hold a different view was **Switzerland**. It agreed with the EU assessment that the resolution “was not balanced” and that “both parties should be reminded of their obligations,” but then declared that the draft “was not without positive elements” and announced it would abstain.

Mexico, which had shifted to “abstain,” said “that the Government of Mexico would have preferred a more balanced text. It was necessary to take up all violations, both arrests of Palestinian ministers and attacks on civilian Palestinian infrastructure, as well as the abduction of the Israeli soldier and attacks on Israeli civilians.”

Brazil, speaking for itself as well as **Argentina** and **Uruguay**, explained their “yes” vote by taking a clearly one-sided position. They emphasized concern “with the increasing deterioration of the living conditions of the Palestinian population” and ignored the Palestinian provocations. Three other Latin American states delivered statements that did not explain why they decided to vote “yes”. **Guatemala** said it voted for the resolution “because it would like to reaffirm the appeal for calm, and to avoid further confrontations.” **Peru** said it would have preferred “a balanced text,” but believed that “international humanitarian law should be invoked in all conflict situations.” **Ecuador** declared that it voted for the resolution because of its “consistent commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights.”

Similarly, the **Philippines** expressed concern “about the escalation of violence in the occupied Palestinian territory” and emphasized that “the first effort should be to safeguard individuals on both sides” but then voted “yes.”

The record of these explanations of vote will, as usual, be filed away and forgotten. But the resolution and the consequences of the “yes” vote will continue to have the effect of demonizing Israel.

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