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THE “REFORMED” UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL BEGINS: IT’S DÉJÀ VU ALL OVER AGAIN

While there was quite a bit of fanfare over the creation of a new, “reformed” UN Human Rights Council to replace the UN Human Rights Commission, some observers expressed serious doubt that the change would go beyond the names of the two bodies. Regrettably, these doubters have been proved right – as demonstrated by the Council’s actions at its opening session in June, 2006.

Continuing the Commission’s tradition, the Council has made Israel the major target of its work and the subject of the only country-specific resolution to be adopted. Moreover, emphasizing its anti-Israel focus, the Council voted to make Israel a permanent agenda item for future sessions as well. Further, rather than waiting for its next regular session to continue Israel-bashing, it will hold a special session on Israel “as soon as possible.”

By adopting Resolution HRC/1 on June 30, 2006, the Council

- (a) calls upon the “*relevant special rapporteurs to report to its next session on the Israeli human rights violations in occupied Palestine,*” and
- (b) places that issue on the Council’s agenda “*at its next session and to incorporate this issue in its following sessions.*”

The vote on the resolution was 29 “yes” to 12 “no” – *with the seven European Union members of the Council voting “no.”* There were 5 abstentions and 1 absence. (The vote tally by regions is noted below.)

Analysis of the vote

Good news: The positive news is that all seven EU members of the Council voted “no,” a welcome step in view of the EU’s traditional abstentions on United Nations resolutions critical of Israel. They were joined by Canada, Japan, Romania, Switzerland and Ukraine. With the deck stacked against its election, the U. S. was not a candidate.

Of three African abstentions, Cameroon could have been expected. But for Ghana and Nigeria to abstain is a hopeful new development. They are important players.

Bad news: Above all, the “yes” votes cast by the Latin Americans are bad news. Peru and Uruguay were particularly disappointing. In view of its past record, Guatemala might have been expected to vote “no,” but given the fact that all the other Latin American states voted “yes,” its decision to abstain is understandable.”

We should also take note of the “yes” vote cast by the Philippines.

Conclusion

The UN Human Rights Council vote suggests three questions which require attention:

- (1) Is there now a chance that the EU will join the U.S. in voting “no” on the key anti-Israel resolutions at the UN General Assembly?
- (2) Can we expect Ghana and Nigeria to abstain on such resolutions, and what does that mean regarding votes cast by other African states?
- (3) What can be done to effect change in Latin America’s anti-Israel votes?

Vote tally by Regions on UN Human Rights Council Resolution 1, June 30, 2006.

The resolution was introduced by 25 members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (including non-members of the Council) plus Cuba and South Africa.

Yes:

Arab League members: **Algeria, Bahrain, Jordan, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia.**
Other members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference: **Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Gabon, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mali, Pakistan, Senegal.**
Latin American states: **Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay.**
Other Asian states: **China, India, Philippines, Sri Lanka.**
Other African states: **Mauritius, South Africa, Zambia.**
East European state: **Russian Federation.**

No:

Members of Western Group: **Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom.**
East European states: **Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Ukraine.**
Asian state: **Japan**

Abstain:

African states: **Cameroon, Ghana, Nigeria.**
Latin American state: **Guatemala.**
Asian state: **South Korea.**

Absent:

Arab League: **Djibouti**

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