

US becomes first nation to quit UN human rights body

Bill Van Auken**20 June 2018**

The United States Tuesday formally withdrew from the United Nations Human Rights Council, the first nation in the world to voluntarily quit the organization.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley announced the decision at the State Department late Tuesday afternoon, delivering prepared remarks and turning on their heels and leaving as the assembled press shouted out questions, including about Washington's own egregious trampling of human rights on the US southern border.

The decision came one day after opening of the session of the council in Geneva in which its outgoing chief, Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein, delivered a farewell speech warning against the rise of "chauvinistic nationalism" and denouncing governments for implementing "policies intended to make themselves as inhospitable as possible by increasing the suffering of many already vulnerable people."

He specifically issued a sharp condemnation of the Trump administration's immigration policy and voiced concern over the US-backed war against Yemen.

"The thought that any state would seek to deter parents by inflicting such abuse on children is unconscionable," he said, demanding that Washington call an immediate halt to its "zero tolerance" immigration policy and the "forcible separation of these children." He quoted the president of the American Association of Pediatrics, who declared that locking the children up separately from their parents constituted "government-sanctioned child abuse."

Turning to Yemen, where the Pentagon has been providing arms, mid-air refueling for Saudi warplanes and intelligence and logistical support without which the near-genocidal war against the Yemeni people could not take place, al-Hussein stated: "I emphasize

my grave worry regarding the Saudi and Emirati-led coalition's ongoing attacks in Hodeidah—which could result in enormous civilian casualties and have a disastrous impact on life-saving humanitarian aid to millions of people which comes through the port."

Just days earlier, Washington and London had joined in killing a Swedish-proposed resolution calling for a ceasefire in Yemen and a halt to the Saudi-UAE offensive.

The developments on the US-Mexican border and the effective torture of children for the purpose of deterring refugees from coming to the US, as well as Washington's criminal role in Yemen, expose the rank hypocrisy of Washington's pretense of quitting the Human Rights Council out of some moral outrage over the body's failure to pursue abusers.

It is clear, however, that the plan to quit the council had been made well in advance, announced nearly a year ago by Haley, and justified in the name of defending Israel and the failure of the body to bow to Washington's demands that it serve as an instrument of US policy of aggression against Russia, China, Iran, Venezuela and Cuba.

A year ago, Haley delivered a speech in Geneva that amounted to an ultimatum to the Human Rights Council to implement US-dictated "reforms" or face Washington's withdrawal.

Chief among the changes demanded by Haley was the abolishing of Agenda Item 7, which makes the "Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied territories" a permanent part of the UNHRC's agenda. The Trump administration and Haley have argued that the existence of the agenda item is evidence of "anti-Israeli bias," rather than the recognition of the unique status of the Palestinian territories, which have been under permanent occupation for over half a century,

with their population denied elemental human rights.

Haley reportedly attempted to blackmail Palestinian representatives at the UN to support the repeal of the agenda item, threatening that unless they did so, Washington would not renew its funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which supports 5.9 million Palestinian refugees and their descendants in Gaza, the West Bank, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

Haley has been a consistent voice in defense of Israeli impunity in the oppression of the Palestinians. Earlier this month she used the US veto on the UN Security Council to kill a resolution calling upon Tel Aviv to avoid “excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate force” in its repression of the “Great March of Return” demonstrations in Gaza, where 128 unarmed protesters have been killed with live ammunition, and another 14,600 injured.

In their remarks at the State Department Tuesday, both Pompeo and Haley made sanctimonious references to “God-given” human rights, that only the Trump administration, presumably, was prepared to uphold.

Pompeo indicted the Human Rights Council for “shameless hypocrisy” in that it had “some of the world’s most serious offenders sitting on the council itself.”

Haley called the council a “cesspool of political bias,” while claiming that Washington’s participation had provided “the last shred of credibility that the council has.”

In reality the biggest human rights criminal on the face of the planet is US imperialism itself, which in the last quarter century of uninterrupted aggressive wars has killed and maimed millions and decimated entire societies. The departure of the US representatives from the council is only another step in the repudiation of international law in the pursuit of an “America first” agenda that points towards new and more catastrophic wars that the UN is incapable of opposing.

The Trump administration will lose influence for the United States and the leverage to affect diplomatic outcomes if it goes ahead with its decision to leave the UN Human Rights Council, US Congressman Eliot Engel said in a statement on Tuesday.

“By withdrawing from the council, we lose our leverage and allow the council’s bad actors to follow their worst impulses unchecked, including running

roughshod over Israel,” Engel, the ranking Democrat on the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, said.



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