UN hypocrisy on human rights continues

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After winning a rigged re-election last year, Venezuelan strongman Nicolas Maduro continues to jail his opponents, violently curtail street protests, strip power from the legislature, and stack the courts with his lackeys.

So, you might wonder why, in recent days, the United Nations General Assembly voted to put Venezuela — which is also where a socialist economy lies in ruins, millions of people continue to flee, and millions more desperately need food, medicine, or other necessities — [on its Human Rights Council](https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/ga12204.doc.htm).

“Electing the oppressive Venezuelan regime of Nicolas Maduro to a human rights council,” Hillel Neuer, who runs the non-profit watchdog UN Watch, observed, “[is like making a pyromaniac into the town fire chief](https://www.africanews.com/2019/10/18/tyrants-celebrate-as-un-elects-venezuela-mauritania-libya-sudan-to-top-rights-body/).”

Unfortunately, Venezuela’s selection to the UN’s key human rights body is [par for an all-too-common course](https://unwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/01/2019-UNHRC-Elections-%E2%80%94-Evalutating-Candidates.pdf), one that elevates the world’s greatest human rights violators by ignoring their abuses.

The United Nations was born in the summer of 1945 to — among other purposes outlined in its charter — “reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and... to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.”

Presumably, the 47-member Human Rights Council is the venue through which the United Nations would most appropriately pursue such lofty goals. Rather than promote human rights, however, the council demeans them by virtue of its membership and its activities.

The General Assembly voted last week to elect 14 new members to the council, each of which will serve for three years and be eligible for a second term.

Along with Venezuela, the new members include such models of human rights probity as Libya (where an authoritarian government or armed groups outside its control engage in extrajudicial killings, arbitrary arrests, human trafficking, rape, and torture); Mauritania (an Islamic republic with sharia law where nearly 100,000 people are slaves, freedom of religion or expression is punishable by death, prison torture is common, and human rights advocates and journalists are jailed); and Sudan, where genocide, murder, rape, and torture were common and human rights advocates and journalists were assaulted under Omar Al-Bashir, and where the military government that ousted him this year has cracked down violently on peaceful protests and shut down the internet.

Lest anyone think that these new members merely represent a temporary, albeit unfortunate, turn in council membership, the 14 new members are replacing, among others, China (which severely restricts free expression, limits the internet, and cracks down on religion by, among other things, holding about [a million Muslim Uighurs in concentration camps](https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/inside-chinese-camps-thought-detain-million-muslim-uighurs-n1062321)), Egypt (where Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who seized power in a coup, tolerates little dissent and jails activists), and Saudi Arabia (where an absolute monarchy allows few political rights and civil liberties, women and religious minorities are second-class citizens, and working conditions for the large population of foreign workers are poor).

Nor should we forget that while China, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia are departing, Venezuela and the other new members will join such remaining rights-challenged members as Afghanistan, Bahrain, Qatar, Pakistan, and the Philippines.

All of this might be forgivable, of course, if the council pursued its mission — “the promotion and protection of all human rights around the globe” — with passion and fairness, letting the chips fall where they may.

Not surprisingly, it doesn’t. Created in 2006 to replace the UN’s Human Rights Commission, which became a laughingstock of anti-Israeli obsessions, the council has [proven even worse](https://www.larryhaasonline.com/2018/07/05/uns-human-rights-council-reeks-of-hypocrisy-us-was-right-to-leave/) on that score by [overwhelmingly targeting its investigations and resolutions on the Jewish state while giving far more serious human rights transgressors, including some council members, a pass](https://honestreporting.com/anti-israel-bias-united-nations-human-rights-council-unhrc/).

The council has made Israel its sole permanent agenda item and, thus, discusses the Jewish state at each of its three meetings a year but not necessarily any other particular country. In its first decade, almost half of the council’s 135 resolutions that criticized countries over human rights focused on Israel.

When it comes to monitoring the human rights records of governments, we have no shortage of reputable groups. Most prominently, in its “[Freedom in the World](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2018)” report each year, Freedom House assesses the political rights and civil liberties in every county and ranks them as “free,” “partly free,” and “not free.”

Perhaps, while meeting UN rules for geographical representation on the council, the General Assembly should factor in the rankings of Freedom House or another reputable watchdog when selecting council members.

In the meantime, for the columnist who believes fervently in human rights and seeks to shame public entities that don’t measure up, the United Nations and its Human Rights Council are the gifts that keep giving.