Remarks by U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley at the 2018 AIPAC Policy Conference

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Thank you so much. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much. You guys are amazing. Thank you so much.

It's so good to see so many friends and I'm honored to be able to say that when I come to AIPAC I am with friends. You know, at the United Nations we sometimes don't have many friends.

I remember last year when we had the vote about America's principled opposition to the Castro dictatorship in Cuba. The vote went against us 191 to 2. The only two ‘no’ votes – you guessed it – were the United States and Israel. But I always say quality is more than quantity.

Shortly after the 2016 election, President-elect Trump called me to talk about serving in his administration. We had a meeting at Trump Tower and we had some good discussions about a variety of issues. Long story short, his team called me a couple of days later and said he liked me to serve as Ambassador to the United Nations.

I said I'm a governor; I don't know anything about the United Nations. We went back and forth on a few things and the clincher was when I told the president, you know I won't be a wallflower or a talking head. I have to be able to say what I think. Without any hesitation, President Trump said, Nikki, that's exactly why I want you to do this.

President Trump has been true to his word and I think I have too. Some of you might've seen that the top Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, recently had some advice for me. He told me to shut up. Mr. Erekat, I will always be respectful, but I will never shut up.

When I spoke here last year I had only been on the job a couple of months. Now it's a year later and I know a lot more than I knew a year ago. But as I've learned more about how the U.N. operates, something else has become really clear: it is important to know as much as possible about every country's needs and views. But that's not the most important part of the job. The most important thing is to not be afraid to stick with the fundamental principles, even when they go against entrenched customs.

Some of those outdated customs have gone unquestioned for years. Long before I got to the U.N., I knew a few things that have served me well in this last year. One of those principles is that standing up for your friends is critical.

So on my first day on the job I chose to reach out to ambassadors from four countries. I called the British and French ambassadors because there are our closest allies on the Security Council, I called the ambassador from Ukraine because I wanted to reassure him that America would not waiver in standing up for Ukraine against Russian aggression; and my fourth call on that first day was to Danny Danon, the Israeli ambassador.

Just about a month before I arrived, the United States allowed Resolution 2334 to pass. It was a shameful day for America. We refused to stand up for our friend when it was singled out for terrible mistreatment. On my first day I assured the Israeli ambassador that on my watch that would never happen again. And I'm proud to say it has not happened again.

Unknown: We love you, Nikki.

Amb. Nikki Haley: I love you too.

Standing up for your friends is very important in the United Nations. Another one of the principles I took with me into the job was that I have absolutely no patience for bullying.

When I grew up, we were the only Indian family in a small southern town in South Carolina. On the whole, it was a great community. My parents and my brother and sister and I were always grateful for the support that surrounded us, but that didn't mean every day was great. My parents were immigrants. My father wore a turban, my mother wore a sari. There were times that we got bullied.

When I was governor I did something about it. I started an anti-bullying program. Every month I went to schools throughout the state to talk about bullying. For me, it was just so fundamental. You don't pick on someone just because they look different than you; you don't pick on someone just because they think differently than you or because you can.

This idea has always been with me since I was a child, but I didn't think it'd come to play in the United Nations. It turns out bullying is a common practice in the United Nations.

In the real world, Israel is a strong country with a vibrant economy and a first-class military. On the battlefield, Israel does not get bullied. The Iranians and Syrians can vouch for that.

But the U.N. is a different story. At the U.N. and throughout the U.N. agencies, Israel does get bullied. It gets bullied because the countries that don't like Israel are used to being able to get away with it. Well, just like when I was that little girl in South Carolina, that just doesn't sit well with me.

As many of you know, one of the U.N. agencies with the worst track record of Israel bias is UNESCO. Among many other ridiculous things, UNESCO has the outrageous distinction of attempting to change ancient history. UNESCO recently declared one of Judaism's holiest sites, the Tomb of the Patriarchs, as a Palestinian heritage site in need of protection from Israel. That was enough. Ten months into this administration, the United States withdrew from UNESCO.

There are lots of other things that we do, big and small, week after week, to fight back against the U.N.'s Israel bullying. Every month at the Security Council we have a session devoted to the Middle East, and every month this session becomes an Israel-bashing session. This has gone on month after month for decades. This was news to me when I arrived. It was actually shocking.

I came out of the first session and publicly said if we want to talk about security in the Middle East, we should talk about Iran or Syria or Hezbollah, Hamas, ISIS, the famine in Yemen. There are probably 10 major problems facing the Middle East and Israel doesn't have anything to do with any of them. Just about every month since then in the Middle East session I have spoken about something other than Israel.

I can't say that we've solved the problem, but I can say that several other countries have followed our lead. What used to be a monthly Israel-bashing session, now at least has more balance, but we're never going to put up with bullying.

There's one more principle I knew before I arrived at the U.N. Like most Americans, I knew what the capital of Israel was. To be more clear, I knew that Jerusalem was, is, and will always be the capital of Israel. This is not something that was –

Unknown: I love you, Nikki.

Amb. Nikki Haley: I love you too. This was not something that was created by the location of an embassy. This is not something that was created by an American decision. America did not make Jerusalem Israel's capital. What President Trump did, to his great credit, was recognize a reality that American presidents had denied for too long.

Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, that's a fact, and President Trump had the courage to recognize that fact when others would not. Sometime in the future, the day will come when the whole world recognizes that fact. In the meantime, I hope to be there and join our great Ambassador David Friedman on the day when we open our brand-new American embassy in Jerusalem.

You know, our embassy decision caused a little bit of a stir at the United Nations. In the Security Council, almost exactly one year after the United States shamefully abstained when the Council attacked Israel with Resolution 2334, I had the great honor of casting my first American veto. When I was governor, I used my veto power dozens of times. At the U.N., I never got to do it until the Jerusalem vote. I got to say, it felt pretty good.

The next week, the Jerusalem issue was brought before the U.N. General Assembly. We lost that vote, but to many people surprise, 65 countries refused to go against us. In the long history of U.N.'s mistreatment of Israel, that's quite a record. And we're not forgetting that vote. Like I said at that time, on that vote we were “taking names.”

Last week I took a trip to Guatemala and Honduras and I thanked them both for voting with us. God bless Guatemala. They even joined us in moving their embassy to Jerusalem.

And President Trump and I are pushing to draw a closer connection between U.S. foreign aid and how countries vote at the U.N. U.N. votes should never be the only factor in our foreign aid decisions. We have many interests that go beyond the U.N. But they should be one of the factors, and we are determined to start making that connection.

Some people accuse us of favoritism towards Israel. First of all, there's nothing wrong with showing favoritism toward an ally. That's what being an ally is all about.

But this is really not about favoritism. In all that we're doing, whether it's the embassy decision or UNESCO, or what we're doing with UNWRA – don't even get me started on that one – our approach on Israel is tied together by one major idea, the idea that runs through all of it is the simple concept that Israel must be treated like any other normal country.

We will continue to demand that Israel not be treated like some sort of temporary, provisional entity. It cannot be the case that only one country in the world doesn't get to choose its capital city. It cannot be the case that the U.N. Human Rights Council has a standing agenda item for only one country.

It cannot be the case that only one set of refugees throughout the world is counted in a way that causes the number to grow forever. It cannot be the case that in an organization with 193 countries, the United Nations spends half of its time attacking only one country. We will not accept it any longer.

And you know what? That demand is actually a demand for peace. The U.N.'s bias against Israel has long undermined peace by encouraging an illusion that Israel will just simply go away. Israel's not going away. When the world recognizes that, then peace becomes possible.

It becomes possible because all sides will be dealing with realities, not fantasies, and when we deal with realities, then reasonable negotiated compromises can prevail over absolutist demands.

Thank you so much for the support that you have continued to show me. There is nothing better than Americans who use the power of their voices for good causes. That's what AIPAC is all about. It's been great being with all of you.

God bless you. Thank you very much.