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Summary

Six decades ago, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the magna carta for mankind. The historic proclamation was created by a drafting committee that included Eleanor Roosevelt, founding chair of the UN Human Rights Commission, Rene Cassin of France, Charles Malik of Lebanon, P.C. Chang of China, and John Humphrey of Canada, and enshrined core principles common to all humanity. The 60th anniversary of the Declaration is a time to celebrate and reaffirm these universal principles.

For proponents of human rights worldwide, however, the celebration of this historic text is marred by the state of crisis that plagues the current UN Human Rights Council (HRC). Created in 2006 to replace the Commission, which became discredited for being politicized and acting arbitrarily, the HRC was supposed to mark a new beginning. Regrettably, with few exceptions, the opposite has happened. The council is dominated today by an alliance of repressive regimes, including China, Cuba, and Saudi Arabia, that has acted systematically to undermine and erode core principles and effective mechanisms created by the generation of Eleanor Roosevelt and those that followed.

For example, the Council this year overturned protection of freedom of expression by a revised mandate, sponsored by Islamic states with Cuban support, that now polices “the abuse” of this freedom. The Council eliminated human rights monitors in Belarus, Cuba, Liberia, Congo (DRC), and Darfur. The expert on Sudan was renewed only for six months, an anomalous term at the Council, and is slated for possible elimination at the March 2009 session. The Council appointed one expert who is the co-founder of the “Moammar Qaddafi Human Rights Prize” (Jean Ziegler), and another who believes that the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were an inside job (Richard Falk). Although a new mechanism to review all states (Universal Periodic Review, or UPR) has potential, thus far it has been largely a toothless exercise.

Sixty years after the founding vision of Eleanor Roosevelt and Rene Cassin, human rights at the United Nations find itself in a state of crisis.

Key facts on the HRC in 2008, as reported by UN Watch:

- **Only 13 of 47 HRC Members Voted Positively:** Out of 47 HRC member states, only a minority of 13 had positive voting records in our study of actions taken on 32 key resolutions. In order of highest ranking, these were **Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Bosnia, Ukraine, Japan, and the Republic of Korea.**
- **Majority 34 of 47 HRC Members Voted Negatively:** A majority of 34 out of the 47 HRC member states had negative voting records—casting ballots against independent human rights mechanisms or basic principles such as free speech—or supported counter-productive resolutions sponsored by repressive regimes. From bad to worse, these were: **Guatemala, Uruguay, Mexico, Peru, Brazil, Bolivia, Gabon, Cameroon, Ghana, India, Madagascar, Philippines, Angola, Jordan, Mauritius, Zambia, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Djibouti, Mali, Nigeria, Pakistan, Qatar, Senegal, South Africa, Cuba, Egypt, Indonesia, Malaysia, Nicaragua, Russia, Sri Lanka and China.** See scorecard and full table of resolutions.

- **HRC Ignored Worst Abusers:** In 2007-2008, the council failed to address the world's worst human rights violations. Of the 20 worst violators on Freedom House's annual survey, the council censured only **Myanmar** and **North Korea**. While it did adopt resolutions on **Sudan**, these were non-condemnatory, weak, and ineffective, some even praising Sudan for its "cooperation." **Somalia's** violations were addressed as a matter of mere "technical consideration." Even worse, the council failed to adopt any resolution, special session or investigative mandate for: **Belarus, China, Cuba, Chad, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Laos, Libya, Morocco, North Korea, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Zimbabwe.**
- **The Spoilers Have It:** While almost half of the Council's 47 members are free democracies (49%), only a minority of these countries—about a dozen—have consistently voted in defense of the values and principles that the Council is supposed to promote. Instead, the body has been dominated by an increasingly brazen alliance of repressive regimes seeking not only to spoil needed reforms but to undermine the few meaningful mechanisms of UN human rights protection that already exist. Their goal is impunity for systematic abuses. Unfortunately, too many democracies have been going along with the spoilers, out of loyalty to regional groups and other political alliances.
- **Total HRC Condemnations to Date:** From its inception in June 2006 to the present, the HRC has condemned **North Korea** in 1 resolution, **Myanmar** in 4, and **Israel** in 20 resolutions. While the council did address Sudan several times, these were not condemnations but weak and ineffective resolutions, some of which actually praised Sudan for its "cooperation." Despite the pleas of former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan as well as current UN chief Ban Ki-moon, the HRC's focus has actually become even more narrow than was the case under the former Commission on Human Rights.
- **Current Composition of the 2008-2009 UN Human Rights Council:**

 - 24 out of 47 current UNHRC members (51%) fall short of basic democracy standards, with ratings of either Partly Free or Not Free.
 - 32 out of 47 UNHRC (68%) members have a negative voting record on UN resolutions that promote human rights.
 - 35 out of the current 47 UNHRC members (74%) have voted to restrict the independence of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.