**Is is time for the UN to be scrapped?**

*January 25, 2010*

[Comments 36](http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/blogs/chutzpah/is-is-time-for-the-un-to-be-scrapped/20100125-mtxy.html#comments)

Even those who applaud the work the UN does are honest enough to admit that there is much wrong about the way it behaves and its moral authority.

For those who follow the UN, a recent Associated Press investigation that the UN “cut back sharply on investigations into corruption and fraud within its ranks, shelving cases involving the possible theft or misuse of millions of dollars” is not surprising.

Even those who applaud the work the UN does are honest enough to admit that there is much wrong about the way it behaves and its moral authority.

When its founders met in San Francisco in 1945 they had noble aspirations in mind, hoping, as its charter states, to "save future generations from the scourge of war". Sadly, the news is not good. When it comes to global peace and security- the purpose for which it was founded- any assessment of the UN's merits must reflect on its tattered record and its series of failures that have cost millions of lives. Indeed, there are many grounds for reproach and regret in the body's conduct in the face of ethnic cleansing.

The UN's hand wringing and passive response to the genocide in Darfur, where hundreds of thousands have died and 1.7 million have been driven from their home, has further damaged its fragile credibility. China and Russia, members of the Security Council, reject even threatening sanctions against Sudan because they do not want to jeopardize their commercial relations with the Sudanese government (China has huge oil interests in Southern Sudan).

Imagine how many lives could have been saved and can be saved with a modest UN force on the ground.

Equally appalling was the foot dragging that led the UN to sit out the terrible genocide in Rwanda in 1994, where close to a million people were shot and clubbed to death.  General Roméo Dallaire, the Canadian commander of the UN force stationed in Rwanda, told the UN that Hutu extremists were getting ready for a campaign of "extermination." His proposal to confiscate the weapons stockpiled by the Hutu so as to stop the plan was vetoed by the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Once the killing began, Dallaire could have used the forces under his command to stop the massacres, but was instructed by the UN to only evacuate foreigners but no Rwandans.  After issuing pious resolutions, the UN withdrew most of its forces instead of sending reinforcements.

As one critic observed, "In the face of evil, the United Nations encourages good men to stand aside and do nothing". The UN did nothing in Bosnia when tens of thousands of Muslim were being murdered, watching helplessly until the US began bombing Serbian military positions, forcing the Serbian forces to agree to all allied demands. In fact, the UN forces assigned to protect the Muslims of Srebrenica, who were led to believe they would be safe in the UN declared six “safe areas”, pulled out and abandoned the victims to be slaughtered.

During the second Congo war, in which nearly 5 million people lost their lives, the UN failed to intervene effectively or carry out humanitarian aid.

Allowing Iraq to defy its will for 12 years without responding emboldened Saadam Hussein and left the UN badly battered. The UN's chronic failure to enforce its own 17 resolutions against Iraq, including 1441, a resolution of last resort, proved that it was clearly not up to the task.  Under its watch North Korea has gone nuclear and Iran is soon to follow.

To this day, the UN can't agree on a new treaty against terrorism because member states can't agree on how to define it.

The UN is scandal ridden. In the Congo, Bosnia, East Timor, Cambodia and Kosovo UN peacekeepers have been accused of raping and sexually abusing the women and children they were sent to protect.  Add to this the oil-for-food program which took billions intended for hungry Iraqis and gave it instead to Saddam Hussein and his henchmen to bribe French and Russian businesses and to the U.N.'s own man in charge, Benon Savan, and a disturbing picture emerges.

Consider also the farcical Human Rights Commission, now known as The Human Rights Council (UNHRC). In 2001, the US lost its seat, while tyrannical Libya and slave owning Sudan, among the world's worst human rights abusers, have served as its chair, along with members that have included Zimbabwe, Cuba, Egypt, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Pakistan, Angola, Azerbaijan, China, Madagascar, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. These despotic and human rights violators sit in judgment on themselves and others. A bad record, it seems, is no bar to membership on this commission.

Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch has complained: "The reason highly abusive governments flock to the Commission is to prevent condemnation of themselves and their kind, and most of the time they succeed." Kofi Annan belatedly admitted that the commission, euphemistically, had a “credibility deficit.”

There is one country that the UNHRC has focused most on. Israel.

UN scholar Anne Bayefsky has noted that the Human Rights Council has:

"Passed more resolutions and decisions condemning Israel than all other 191 U.N. members combined. The council has one (of only 10) formal agenda items dedicated to criticizing Israel. And one agenda item to consider the human rights of the remaining 99.9 percent of the world's population. ... It has terminated human rights investigations on Belarus, Cuba, Liberia, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. And all investigations of 'consistent patterns of gross and reliably attested violations of all human rights and all fundamental freedoms' in such states as Iran, Kyrgyzstan, the Maldives, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have been 'discontinued.'"

No wonder that the Goldstone report (established by the UNHRC to investigate Operation Cast Lead in Gaza) has been found to be highly problematic and unreliable.

Since the 1960’s, almost 30 per cent of the resolutions passed by the UNHRC have been aimed at Israel, and of the 10 emergency special sessions ever convened, six have been directed at Israel.  Israel is the only country with its own UN monitor, the Special Commission to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. The UN failed to sanction Saddam Hussein when he "rewarded" Palestinian homicide bombers for murdering Israelis.

The United Nations General Assembly has been, for the most part, a platform for denunciations of Israel. In 1975, the General Assembly passed the infamous 'Zionism is racism' resolution, later rescinded, that marked the anti-Israel campaign that continues to this day. Then US Ambassador to the UN Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan recalled in his book A Dangerous Place, that the shameless resolution was not only aimed against Israel but also against world Jewry. Intellectual William F. Buckley observed at the time that the UN had become “the most concentrated gathering of anti-Semitism since the days of Hitler’s Germany” while Lionel Trilling maintained that with this legal travesty the ghost of Hitler haunted the halls of the UN.

When the first declaration on religious intolerance was passed in 1981, anti-Semitism was excluded, while in the infamous 2001 World Conference against Racism in Durban references to Anti-Semitism were excised from almost all sections of the final declaration.   In November 2003 Kofi Annan refused to publicly support a proposed General Assembly declaration condemning anti-Semitism.

At the 2001 UN Durban Racism Conference, Israel, out of all of the dictatorships and serial rights abusers, was singled out as a racist state. In 2003, the General Assembly passed four resolutions focusing on specific countries, reserving 18 for Israel alone.  China, Syria, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Yemen and Zimbabwe were spared rebuke. Even a resolution against Sudan, guilty of cross amputation, death by hanging, crucifixion, and stoning women to death for adultery, was defeated.

In 2004, Israel was discussed, for five straight days, under the guise of self determination, racism and then was the only item on the Human Rights Commission’s agenda dedicated in its entirety to one member state, when all 191 countries were treated jointly under a separate item.

And when in May 2004, Lakhdar Brahimi, the UN’s special envoy to Iraq (who boasted that he has never knowingly shaken hands with an Israeli or a Jew) told reporters that “the policy of Israel is a poison in the mid- East”, Annan’s spokesman said that Brahimi was speaking in his personal capacity and brings to the table strongly held views.

Up until recently, Israel was the only country denied membership in any UN committees.

In 2000, following Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon, three Israeli soldiers patrolling the U.N.-overseen Lebanese border were kidnapped by Hezbollah terrorists. When Israel learned that Indian peacekeepers from the United National Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) had videotaped the kidnapping it asked for the tapes. Both UNIFIL commanders and Terje Roed-Larsen, the Secretary General's personal representative to the Middle East said no such tape existed. Eventually, the UN admitted it possesed the tape, which could have helped Israel in tracking down the kidnappers, but refused to release it, claiming it wanted to remain neutral.  The UN later admitted it had second tape related to the kidnapping. After 10 months of intense pressure, it allowed Israeli officials to view the tapes. Ultimately, it was concluded that the three soldiers were pronounced murdered.  When The U.S. House Middle East Subcommittee convened a hearing on the deaths of the three Israeli soldiers, its chair Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen lambasted the United Nations for aiding the Hezbollah terrorists. The tapes were of vital importance to Israel since it believed that the Hezbollah were disguised as U.N. peacekeepers and were therefore able to lure the soldiers.

Indeed, against the abiding saga of abiding animosity, one journalist has speculated that perhaps the UN regrets its decision to establish the state of Israel in 1948.

Believe it or not, but three years ago Zimbabwe was elected to head the UN Commission on Sustainable Development. How anyone could choose the government of Robert Mugabe, a regime that has destroyed the country’s human and natural resources and starved its people is mind-boggling. When you consider that North Korea currently sits on the executive boards of both The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the U.N. Development Program it’s clear that something is not right. Two years ago, on the same day that Iran informed the world that it could now enrich uranium, it was re-elected as vice chair of the U.N. Disarmament Commission. This was despite the U.N. Disarmament Commission ruling that Iran violated its non-proliferation resolutions. Eric Shawn, author of The U.N. Exposed: How the United Nations Sabotages America's Security and Fails the World said of Iran’s election, "If there isn't a more blatant example of the hypocrisy and meaninglessness of some of the decisions over there, I don't know what is. You can't make this stuff up." Syria, on the US State Department’s list of terrorist nations for the last 30 years was elected as the U.N. Disarmament Commission recording secretary.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has also failed to live up to its mission and founding ideals. It awarded Islam Karimov, Uzbekistan’s brutal dictator (accused of murder, torture and slave labour of children) the prestigious gold Borobudur medal  in 2006 for “strengthening friendship and cooperation between nations, development of cultural and religious dialogue, and supporting cultural diversity”. This was after the European Union voted in October 2005 to partially suspend its Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Uzbekistan—the first time it has ever done so with any country.

In 2006, UNESCO awarded another tyrant, Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez, the José Martí International Prize, given to those who have contributed to the “struggle for liberty”. The prize was personally presented to Chavez by Cuban president Fidel Castro. Perhaps the prize was for Chavez taking the UN stage and calling President Bush the devil, saying “it smells of sulfur still today" a day after Bush addressed the world body. And just this month, UNESCO sponsored a conference in Beirut that gave international “resistance organisations” such as Hezbollah a forum to attack Israel and the United States.

Last October, Farouk Hosny, Egypt’s minister for Culture narrowly lost his bid to become UNESCO's next director general after he was considered a shoo-in to win the election. In May 2008, Hosny publicly vowed to personally burn any Israeli books found in Egyptian libraries, a pledge that led several leading intellectuals and peace activists, including Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel, to call on the UN to “spare itself the shame" of choosing such a leader.  Reporters Without Borders, the Journalism watchdog, said Hosni did not show his support for the freedom of expression - one of UNESCO's underlying missions - and said that he was “one the main actors of censorship in Egypt”. After his loss Hosni blamed “Zionist pressures” and an unnamed group of Jewish leaders who wielded influence on the elections.

The real problem is that the UN does not distinguish between brutal dictatorships such as North Korea or Syria and free, democratic societies such as Australia.  There are fewer than 50 democracies among its 192 members.

To put it bluntly, any genocidal, theocratic or terrorist state is welcomed. That is why Iran’s President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who denies the Holocaust and has openly called for Israel to be wiped off the map, has been twice invited to speak from the United Nations General Assembly podium. His 2009 speech, in which he accused Jews of seeking to "establish a new form of slavery and harm the reputation of other nations…to attain its racist ambitions" was full of anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic language which prompted 11 countries to walk out, including Australia, the USA, New Zealand, Great Britain and France.

A few days later Israel’s PM, Benjamin Netanyahu, hit back at Ahmadinejad's questioning of the Holocaust. Holding up the protocol of the 1942 conference at Wannsee, Berlin, where senior Nazis decided on the extermination of European Jewry, and the blueprints for Auschwitz, including gas chambers and crematoria - where more than one million Jews were murdered - Netanyahu castigated U.N. delegates who remained for Ahmadinejad's speech, “To those who gave this Holocaust-denier a hearing, I say on behalf of my people, the Jewish people, and decent people everywhere: Have you no shame?  Have you no decency?  A mere six decades after the Holocaust, you give legitimacy to a man who denies that the murder of six million Jews took place and pledges to wipe out the Jewish state. What a disgrace!  What a mockery of the charter of the United Nations!"

One of the suggestions put forward is that democracies stand united in campaigning more vigorously for human rights initiatives and attempt to change the membership qualifications so as to exclude brutal and authoritarian regimes.  Former presidential candidate, Senator John McCain has called for the establishment of a League of Democracies, “a group of "like-minded nations working together in the cause of peace." However, the idea of a United Democratic Nations to substitute the UN has not been pursued seriously by any country.

With a budget of $3 billion and a staff of some 15,000 the Secretary General of the UN does not lack resources to take a strong stance on a host of issues and to act decisively.  Money is not the problem.

The UN has been often derided as an ageing toothless tiger in decline, an undemocratic, inefficient, secretive, unaccountable body that needs to take a long, hard, unbiased look at itself. The question is whether the UN’s time is up.