



Committee on Foreign Affairs

CHAIRMAN ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN



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Opening Statement

Markup: United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act (H.R. 2829)

October 13, 2011

Let me briefly reiterate some of the reasons why this bill is so needed. Last year, the U.S. contributed a record \$7.7 billion to the UN—21 percent more than in 2009. The Administration’s own ambassador for management and reform, Joseph Torsella, has said “For a decade now, the United Nations regular budget has grown dramatically, relentlessly, and exponentially.”

Now, as Americans struggle to pay their bills and put food on the table, UN employees are about to receive another pay hike. The Administration has rightfully urged the UN to cut its budget and cancel the pay increase. But the UN will actually be increasing its budget in the next 2 years. As Ambassador Torsella said, this budget increase “does not represent a break from ‘business as usual,’ but rather a continuation of it.”

And what are we paying for? A UN Human Rights Council that includes such gross human rights violators as China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and its vice-chair, Cuba. Two years after the Administration joined the Council, the Council still has undergone zero fundamental reforms, continues to pass resolution after resolution condemning Israel, and its permanent agenda item on Israel remains in place.

We’re paying for the Durban process, which has been hijacked to spread anti-Israel and anti-Semitic venom. Then there’s the UN Conference on Disarmament, recently chaired by North Korea. So serial proliferator North Korea presided over the UN’s disarmament body, and Iran, a regime which stones women to death, is a member of the UN Commission on the Status of Women.

We’re paying for a UN that just appointed as the head of its Kosovo mission an individual involved with the infamous Oil-for-Food scandal, and a UN that goes after whistleblowers while protecting the corrupt.

Why do we bear the financial burden for this? Every year, scores of member countries that contribute almost nothing to the UN vote together to pass the budget. Then they pass the costs on to big donors like the U.S., which is assessed a whopping 22 percent.

In contrast, China pays just 3 percent. We need a game-changer.

We will never achieve lasting, sweeping reforms if the U.S. keeps paying in full what the UN dictates to us, with no consequences for the UN’s failures. It’s time to leverage our funding to

achieve lasting UN reform, by passing this UN Reform bill. This bill seeks to shift the funding basis for the UN's regular budget to voluntary contributions, so that American taxpayers can choose how much of their hard-earned money goes to the UN and what it's spent on. A shift to voluntary funding will help end the UN's entitlement culture, forcing it to perform better and cut costs in order to justify its funding.

The best-performing UN bodies are usually the ones funded voluntarily, like UNICEF and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. That's why the bipartisan Gingrich-Mitchell report recommended shifting more UN programs to voluntary funding.

The Secretary of State sent me a letter yesterday opposing our bill. The Secretary claims, if we move to a system of voluntary funding, it will hurt our soldiers in Afghanistan and Iraq, because other member states won't do the "burden-sharing" to pay for UN missions in those countries. Does the Administration have such little faith in our allies and in our diplomacy – which they pride themselves on – to think that they would not share the burden of fighting Islamist extremists unless the UN forced them to? And given that the U.S. paid billions and billions of dollars to the UN last year, I think it's clear who is actually carrying the burden without any say: the U.S. taxpayer.

On the Ranking Member's amendment in the nature of a substitute, regrettably, this substitute is just that—a substitute for real reform. On each area it addresses, the main prescription is rhetoric, but no real consequences for UN inaction.

The substitute states that the Administration should take the status of reform efforts at voluntarily-funded UN bodies into account when determining how much to contribute to those bodies. I believe this is an acknowledgement of just how effective voluntary funding is at achieving reform. Yet, the Ranking Member opposes the proposal in the underlying bill to shift the funding basis for the UN regular budget to voluntary contributions, which increases our leverage to achieve reform throughout the UN system, as well as enable us to fund those programs that actually work and advance U.S. interests.

Leveraging our contributions, as the underlying bill proposes, can help stop Abu Mazen's dangerous Palestinian statehood scheme. By contrast, the substitute amendment offers no consequences if any UN body upgrades the Palestinian status.

Turning to peacekeeping, like Mr. Berman, I value the contribution peacekeepers have made to global peace and security, including in Haiti. But the substitute fails to address the urgent need for reforms to restore the reputation of UN peacekeeping, particularly in light of recent reports of sexual abuse of minors by peacekeepers in Haiti, and the illegal exploitation of natural resources by UN employees in Congo.

I ask my colleagues to oppose this substitute, and settle for nothing less than real reform by supporting the underlying bill.