

Foreign Policy at BROOKINGS

U.S. ENGAGEMENT WITH THE U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS SYSTEM

Feb. 17, 2010

Summary

The Carter Center and the Brookings Institution's Managing Global Insecurity Initiative convened human rights advocates from Brazil, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Russia, and the United States to evaluate the impact of the U.N.'s human rights system on their work. Those gathered applauded the decision by the Obama Administration to re-engage with the United Nations and offered a number of steps the United States can take to help strengthen these agencies so vital to the advancement of human rights globally.

President Obama was widely praised by human rights activists for his stated commitment to lead by example in the advancement of global cooperation, human rights, and international law. Concern remains, however, that erosion of human rights that took place under the previous administration continue to undermine global rights standards.

When it joined the U.N. Human Rights Council in 2009, the United States sent a clear signal that it would help make the organization a stronger force for human rights in the coming years. The human rights leaders gathered expressed their hope that the Administration would press forward with this approach by:

- x fully implementing the president's commitment to bring U.S. human rights policies and practices into compliance with universal human rights norms and accept scrutiny of its own record by U.N. bodies,
- x submitting a rigorous national report to the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) process,
- x insisting on increased attention and action on serious human rights situations, wherever they occur,
- x protecting and strengthening the independence and involvement of the Special Procedures,
- x pressing for robust participation of NGOs within the U.N. human rights system, and

x protecting existing international human rights standards from being weakened.

A Good Beginning

President Obama's early commitment to reverse previous administration's policies related to human rights, such as torture, secret prisons, and indefinite detention, was welcomed by human rights advocates as an expression of America's traditional defense

- x In Colombia, the U.N. Special Rapporteur on arbitrary and extrajudicial executions registered a huge increase in killings of civilians by the armed forces, validating the work carried out by Colombian human rights defenders.
- x In addition to documenting human rights violations, U.N. rights bodies issue recommendations for remedying them. Increased pressure on governments is needed to implement these findings.
- x

7. Nominate and support qualified candidates for selection to the Human Rights Council, push back against attacks on Special Rapporteurs and NGOs through abuse of the Code of Conduct and Human Rights Council processes, and work toward electing member states on the ECOSOC NGO Committee that have proven their commitment to supporting the freedom of independent civil society organizations.
8. Work to mobilize qualified candidates)JTJ 17.41 0d0 TOC le.Brnr.O Tcg Tf 3d0e.ndiJTJto002 Tw