**Look Who Will Be Joining the U.N. Human Rights Council**

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The U.N. Human Rights Council has an election coming up in October, which can mean only one thing: A new slate of human rights abusers are poised to be elected to the U.N.'s top human rights body.

The council already currently includes such human rights luminaries as: China, Cote d'Ivoire, Cuba, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela. They will be joined—at minimum—by the notorious Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Angola.

The election of these new states—both ranked by Freedom House in the lowest possible category of human rights protection ("not free")—is a done deal because of a deliberate U.N. process. Each of the five U.N. regional groups are allowed to put forward fixed slates, whereby the number of states running is equal to the number of seats that the regional group has been allotted. The result is a guaranteed spot. Angola and the DRC are part of the African regional group's fixed slate.

In addition, the Asian regional group is offering voters (the 193 member states of the General Assembly) a lose-lose proposition. The five states running for the four available seats in the Asian group are Afghanistan, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, and Qatar. Therefore, we know for certain that one of the two human rights paragons Afghanistan or Qatar—both ranked "not free" by Freedom House—will be elected.The U.N. system is rigged to allow human rights abusers to sit in judgement about what counts as human rights abuse, and who’s to blame, because there are no pre-conditions for membership on the council. There are no requirements that would entail actually protecting human rights. The only requisite is getting a minimum of 97 votes, a majority of members of the General Assembly.Since fewer than half of U.N. members are themselves fully free democracies, mutual back-scratching is the name of the game. The U.N. procedure does ask candidates to promise to behave, through what it calls a pledging system. In practice, many states are elected without even producing a pledge. The pledges that are received from the worst of the worst are shameless. For this year's forthcoming elections, for instance Afghanistan, Angola, and Qatar are among those who have submitted pledges Qatar's pledge includes: "The promotion and protection of human rights is one of the policy pillars of the State of Qatar." It claims to have "a constitutional and legislative system that embodies the principles of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and respects and protects everyone." It says "the state of Qatar ... respects freedom of expression and judicial independence." More accurately, according to the latest State Department human rights report on Qatar: "The principal human rights problems were the inability of citizens to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections. ... The monarch-appointed government prohibited organized political parties and restricted civil liberties, including freedoms of speech, press, and assembly. ... Legal, institutional, and cultural discrimination against women limited their participation in society."Afghanistan's pledge, produced as a slick 16-page color production that is short on words but has lots of color photos of dancing children, smiling women and flying birds, provides this assurance: "since 2001, Afghanistan has moved towards the progressive realization of human rights values and principles.”

In fact, as the State Department reports: "The most significant human rights problems were ... torture and abuse of detainees by government forces; widespread disregard for the rule of law and little accountability for those who committed human rights abuses; and targeted violence and endemic societal discrimination against women and girls.”

Angola pledges it is "fulfilling its commitments to advancing human rights, consistent with its constitutional provisions, which broadly embrace the values and principles of democracy and ... fundamental freedoms."The people of Angola might beg to disagree, that is, if they could get out of prison. As the State Department reports: “The three most important human rights abuses were cruel, excessive, and degrading punishment, including reported cases of torture and beatings; limits on freedoms of assembly, association, speech, and press; and official corruption and impunity.”The real question to be asked, however, is not why states that abuse human rights lie, feign interest in human rights protection, or want to legitimize their regimes via the U.N. Human Rights Council. The question is why the world's leading democracy, the United States, is willing to sit side-by-side with these countries as equals and effectively serve as their legitimizer.The Trump administration took over membership on the Council after President Obama obtained a three-year term for the United States that began on Jan. 1, 2017. Joining the Human Rights Council was one of Obama’s very first foreign policy decisions and the U.S. belonged for two terms from 2009 to 2015, when U.N. rules mandated a one-year hiatus. By running for a third term commencing just weeks before a new administration was due to take office, Obama fully intended to rule from the grave.

In light of the inevitability of the U.N.’s top “human rights” body empowering human rights offenders, the Bush administration refused to join the council, period. With this first Human Rights Council election since he came to office, President Trump has been handed the opportunity—and the responsibility—to resign, effective immediately.