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U.N. Human Rights Council Members Elected

Performance of the council is what counts, U.S. Ambassador Bolton says

By Judy Aita
Washington File UN Correspondent

United Nations -- The General Assembly has elected 47 nations to serve on the new Human Rights Council that will replace the discredited U.N. Commission on Human Rights in June.

Members include states whose poor human rights records have been criticized and examined for decades as well as others with excellent records as human rights leaders. The United States did not seek a seat on the council.

U.S. Ambassador John Bolton said he was not surprised that "a number of countries that themselves are gross abusers of human rights got elected."

"The real performance of the Human Rights Council over a two- or three-year period is going to be what is critical," Bolton said.

Council membership is apportioned to five regional groups: 13 seats for African states, 13 for Asian states, eight for Latin American and Caribbean states, seven for Western European states and others, and six seats for Eastern European states.

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The first meeting of the Human Rights Council will be held on June 19 in Geneva. The council will meet regularly, scheduling no fewer than three 10-week sessions a year and will be able to hold special sessions if needed.

Elected for one year are Algeria, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia, Bahrain, Indonesia, Philippines, India, Poland, Czech Republic, Argentina, Ecuador, Finland and the Netherlands. Nations serving for two years are Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Zambia, Pakistan, Japan, Sri Lanka, Republic of Korea, Romania, Ukraine, Brazil, Guatemala, Peru, the United Kingdom and France.

Cameroon, Djibouti, Mauritius, Nigeria, Senegal, Bangladesh, China, Jordan, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Azerbaijan, Russia, Cuba, Mexico, Uruguay, Canada, Germany and Switzerland will serve for three years. In the future, nations will be elected to three-year terms of office.

Candidates submitted pledges and commitments to promote and protect human rights. According to the regulations establishing the new council, its members will be the first to have their human rights records reviewed.

THE U.S. POSITION

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Kristin Silverberg said the real test of the council will be whether it can take effective action in serious cases of human rights abuse, such as in Darfur, Burma and North Korea.

In 2006, the United States will "engage actively as observers," including lobbying for human rights resolutions, Silverberg said. Assuming the council can work effectively, the United States plans to run for election next year, the assistant secretary said.

The United States, although it was a leading supporter of Secretary-General Kofi Annan's 2005 proposal to abolish the Commission on Human Rights and replace it with a stronger organization, voted against the creation of the council in March. The design of the new council, U.S. officials said, did not have standards for membership that were high enough to keep human rights abusers off the council.

HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS

The reactions of human rights groups were mixed after the General Assembly vote. Ann Bayefsky of the Hudson Institute project Eye on the UN said that 20 countries ranked "partly free" or "not free" by Freedom House are now on the council. "Obviously a number of governments did get elected that we would prefer not to be there – China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Cuba," according to Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch.

"The important step is that we've made real progress. Spoiler governments who have a history of trying to undermine the protection of human rights through their membership are now a significantly reduced minority when it comes to the council," Roth said.

The fact that Venezuela and Iran did not win seats on the council and that Zimbabwe, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Syria and Vietnam did not even try was "good news," Roth added. "That doesn't guarantee it will be a success, but it is a step in the right direction."

"The countries that have weak human rights records and are elected to the council must now start re-examining their own records and improve them and implement the pledges they have made to the General Assembly," said Yvonne Terlingen, U.N. representative for Amnesty International.

"We will closely watch to see if they do so," Terlingen said.

For additional information, see United States and U.N. Reform: http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/UNGA_2005.html

Iran Can Choose Confrontation or Cooperation, Says United States

Ambassador Schulte urges nations to help Iran resolve nuclear standoff

By David I. McKeeby
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The international community must convince the Iranian regime to choose cooperation over confrontation in resolving the ongoing standoff over its nuclear program, says Ambassador Gregory Schulte.

In a May 9 speech at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy in Switzerland, Schulte, the U.S. permanent representative to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)

and the United Nations' Mission in Vienna, Austria, said, "This determined pursuit of a nuclear weapons capability by the dangerous regime in Tehran threatens Iran's neighbors and the wider world community."

Schulte delivered his speech as Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice met in New York with the foreign ministers from the U.N. Security Council's four other permanent members -- China, France, Russia and the United Kingdom -- and those from Germany and the European Union to chart a long-term strategy to deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions.

IRAN'S NUCLEAR CLAIMS MISLEADING

According to the IAEA's April 28 report on Iran, Schulte said, instead of honoring the international community's repeated requests to suspend its nuclear program and return to negotiations, the regime continues to enrich uranium, is proceeding with the construction of a heavy-water reactor that could supply weapons-grade material and continues to limit access of IAEA inspectors to key facilities.

The IAEA report severely undermines the Iranian regime's repeated claims that its nuclear program is geared solely toward the development of civilian nuclear energy, Schulte said. "If the program is peaceful, why 18 years of deceit ... why not cooperate with the IAEA ... why the unexplained ties to the A.Q. Kahn network ... why does Iran possess a document on fabricating nuclear weapons components ... why the unexplained ties to Iran's military and its missile program?" Schulte asked rhetorically.

Schulte discounted Iran's claim that it needs enriched uranium for civilian power plants, pointing out that Iran's sole nuclear power plant in Bushehr already is slated to receive fuel from Russia under a long-term contract, and that many other countries that use nuclear energy to generate electricity purchase enriched uranium instead of processing it themselves.

CONSENSUS GROWING ABOUT IRAN'S NUCLEAR AMBITIONS

Schulte said Iran has refused to comply with even a single request from the U.N. Security Council since it called on the Iranian government in March to suspend nuclear activities and re-establish cooperation with IAEA monitors. The ambassador noted that the IAEA's February vote that referred Iran to the Security Council reflected a broad global consensus on the threat posed by Iran. Countries as diverse as Russia, China, India, Argentina, Brazil Sri Lanka, Ghana, Japan, Korea, Australia, Ecuador, Colombia, Canada, Egypt and Yemen all supported the measure, which expressed concern about Iran's continuing refusal to cooperate with international nuclear inspectors. It also illustrates a growing consensus about the security threat a nuclear-armed Iran poses regionally and to the larger international community due to its documented support of terrorism, he said.

Continued instability caused by the regime's "outrageous statements and defiant behavior" already has led to tangible economic effects, said Schulte, noting that leading major international banks, investors and multinational corporations have reconsidered doing business with Iran. Even officials from across the Iranian political spectrum have started questioning the regime's course of action, he added.

UNITED STATES COMMITTED TO A DIPLOMATIC SOLUTION

Schulte reiterated that the United States' goal "remains a diplomatic solution, one in which Iran's leaders set aside their ambitions for nuclear weapons capabilities and grasp the diplomatic opportunities offered by the world community."

He called on Iran to reconsider a plan offered in August 2005 by the United Kingdom, France and Germany and supported by the United States and Russia. That plan would reaffirm Iran's right to the peaceful use of nuclear energy, provide assurances of fuel supplies, further Iran's desire for expanded civilian nuclear energy, offer a new political and security relationship based on cooperation, and propose new frameworks for economic and technological cooperation. Even though the United Kingdom, France, Germany and the United States are committed to a successful diplomatic outcome in the United Nations, Schulte said they are also considering an alternate "range of targeted sanctions" in the face of continued Iranian defiance.

U.S.-IRANIAN DIALOGUE NOT THE SOLUTION, SCHULTE SAYS

Following his speech, Schulte responded to journalists' questions.

"We don't need lengthy letters from Iran's president," said Schulte, referring to the May 8 message from President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to President Bush.

"What we need is a decision on his part and on the part of the leadership in Iran to negotiate seriously."
Schulte told journalists that the Iranian leadership's continuing refusal to cooperate is aggravating the country's economic problems and driving away desperately needed foreign investment, further isolating the country and harming the Iranian people.

"This is an issue between the Islamic Republic and the whole world," Schulte said. Therefore, multilateral diplomacy, such as efforts at the United Nations and talks overseen by Britain, France and Germany are the best way to address the issue, not talks between the United States and Iran, he explained. Even Russia and China, viewed as the most reluctant of the Security Council's permanent members to pursue stronger international measures against Iran at this time, have joined the international community in urging Iran's leaders to choose cooperation over confrontation, the ambassador said.

Schulte dismissed threats from Iranian authorities to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, noting that while Iran's leaders are adept at making threats, they often backfire by uniting "countries in their concern about Iran's nuclear program, the intentions of the leadership, and in their calls upon Iran to cease these activities."

"I think there is a strong message of international solidarity and a strong message that we hope the Iranian leadership will hear that they need to negotiate," Schulte said.

Transcripts of Schulte's speech and his remarks to the press are available from the Web site of the U.S. Mission to the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland:
http://geneva.usmission.gov/

Bill Would Repeal Remaining U.S. Export Credits Ruled Out by WTO

Ahead of EU sanctions, House and Senate conferees add provision to tax bill

By Bruce Odessey
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- In a surprise development, members of Congress have inserted into a high-priority tax-cut bill repeal of certain export credits that the World Trade Organization (WTO) has ruled illegal.

The House of Representatives was expected to vote on the bill late May 10, and the Senate within a few days afterward, before the European Union (EU) imposes on May 16 retaliatory trade sanctions approved by the WTO.

If Congress passes the bill, President Bush is considered likely to sign it because it contains tax-cut measures he long has sought.

House and Senate conferees had worked for months to resolve their differences over the five-year bill, which would extend lower tax rates on investments and prevent millions of middle-income taxpayers from becoming subject to a higher alternative minimum tax.

Without public discussion, the conferees inserted the provision repealing the export credits, which had not been considered previously by either the full House or Senate or any committees.

At issue are remnant export credits from the Foreign Sales Corporation (FSC) and the successor Extraterritorial Income Exclusion Act (ETI). After the WTO ruled in cases brought by the European Union (EU) that those credits violated a subsidies agreement, Congress repealed nearly all of them over a two-year transition ending in 2006.

Congress left in place, however, a few export credits that were included in binding contracts made before September 17, 2003, including contracts made by U.S. aircraft manufacturer Boeing.

In yet another challenge brought by the EU, the WTO ruled that both the two-year transition and the excluded credits were not in compliance with the earlier dispute-settlement decisions.

The provision in the tax bill would not alter the two-year transition but would repeal the exclusions for the binding contracts. According to one published report, the EU has decided that passage of this provision would suffice to suspend its planned sanctions.

For additional information, see Trade and Economics:
http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/

Relations with China a Top U.S. Concern, State's Zoellick Says

Domestic concerns, global stakes bind the countries, deputy secretary says

By Jane Morse
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Relations with China are a top concern for the United States and will be for the foreseeable future, says Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick.

"Aside from dealing with Islamic political radicalism and terrorism, how we deal with China's growing influence is one of the central questions of 21st Century U.S. diplomacy," he told the House International Relations Committee May 10.

According to Zoellick, U.S.-China relations are operating on two levels: global and domestic.

As the world's major powers, China and the United States both are affected by transnational threats such as disease, terrorism and environmental degradation, he said.

On the domestic level, there is "strong U.S. concern" regarding China's performance on human rights, individual freedom and political reform. There are concerns on both sides, he said, regarding economics and trade and access to markets.

Zoellick said China is increasing its influence within the international system, and he acknowledged that "China's growing global footprint" is a cause for tensions.
That is offset, he said, by the fact that China's focus is now on pursuing its own economic, political and military strength vis-à-vis other states within the international system rather than promoting communist revolution and ideological struggle from outside it.

He added, however, that China's great economic strides are threatened by corruption that undermines the legitimacy of its leadership.

"Right now China's political legitimacy is not based on democracy, and it's not based on an ideology of communism. It's based on economic performance and nationalism," Zoellick told the panel. "And that has some fragility," he said, since much of the population is still poor and millions more jobs are needed.

"According to Chinese government figures alone," Zoellick said, "they've had 87,000 incidents of unrest last year."

China's leadership recognizes that it will need to develop "a social safety net to forestall unrest," Zoellick said. "And this could have some important economic implications." If China actually develops programs to provide for pensions and health care, there will be fewer reasons for people to save, he said, and possibly more reasons for greater consumption, which, in turn, could help with imbalances in trade.

Zoellick discussed the need for China to become a "responsible stakeholder," explaining that "a more influential China has greater capacity than most to help maintain the peaceful, prosperous, and open international system from which it has benefited."

He acknowledged that the word "stakeholder" has no easy translation into Chinese, and as a result, there has been great debate in China about the concept.
"There's not a part of the world market that China doesn't affect," Zoellick said. China fully is integrated into the international system, part of the World Trade Organization, the United Nations Security Council and many other structures including those dealing with nonproliferation.

"But it prompts the question, integration to what end? What's the purpose of this integration? How will China use this new influence? It's not just a question of membership in the international system," Zoellick said, "but how has it exercised responsibility and a shared stake in this international system."

"And what I've emphasized to the Chinese," Zoellick said, "is the Chinese have talked about peaceful rise, peaceful development.

"Well, we encourage this, but they need to recognize that no countries are going to bet their future on it, and that's where Chinese policy, Chinese transparency, Chinese action on human rights, will be critically important."

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