



**DEMOCRACY
COALITION
PROJECT**

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UN VOTING PATTERN SHOWS INCREASE IN CENSURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS

Six out of Seven Resolutions Approved in General Assembly's Third Committee; Action Blocked on Sudan

The United Nations General Assembly's Third Committee approved six out of seven resolutions criticizing human rights violations in specific countries this year,¹ demonstrating a marked improvement in member states' willingness to adopt such resolutions, a new Democracy Coalition Project (DCP) survey shows. A seventh resolution was blocked from consideration by a motion to adjourn the debate, down from three resolutions blocked last year.

Consistent support from new and old democracies from the Americas and Europe for resolutions that condemn the worst human rights violations, coupled with an increasing tendency by democracies in Africa and the Caribbean to abstain from voting against such resolutions, account for the improvement this year, the annual survey reveals.

Resolutions criticizing the human rights situations in North Korea, Iran, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Congo, and Myanmar were all approved. A "no action motion" on Sudan, introduced by Nigeria on behalf of the Africa Group, succeeded in preventing consideration of a resolution critical of human rights abuses in Darfur.

The new Democracy Coalition Project survey (<http://www.demcoalition.org/pdf/Scorecard%202005-2006%20Table.pdf>), released on the eve of International Human Rights Day, charts the votes of the 191 member states of the UN General Assembly. The scorecard compares the votes cast by the over 120 members of the UN Democracy Caucus, a new grouping established by the Community of Democracies, with non-members. All the resolutions covered by the survey were taken to a recorded vote with the exception of the resolution on Myanmar, which was approved by consensus.²

The voting pattern reveals that the UN Democracy Caucus (UNDC) is split into three de facto groups that mirror the larger UN membership. The first group of old and new democracies in the Americas and Europe, joined by Japan, Australia and New Zealand, consistently sponsors and supports resolutions that address the most

¹ At the time of writing, the resolutions were approved in the Third Committee, but had not yet been officially adopted by the Plenary of the General Assembly.

² The resolution on the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) was tabled by the European Union with the cooperation and support of the DRC. The measure was nearly approved by consensus, but two countries – Uganda and Rwanda – voted against it due to indirect references to their role in the violence in the eastern part of that country.

egregious human rights violations. A smaller second group of countries regularly joins the non-democracies in opposing such resolutions and prioritizes regional and bilateral relations, north/south considerations, or the principle of “non-interference” in internal affairs. The third group, mainly composed of smaller countries in Africa and the Caribbean, is more varied but largely abstains or is absent from voting.

Key countries within the UN Democracy Caucus, most notably **India** and **South Africa**, continue to be steadfast in blocking resolutions criticizing rights violators. Both countries are members of the UNDC’s steering committee (known as the Convening Group), yet both voted against or abstained from voting on the resolutions. Both also voted in favor of blocking any debate on the Sudan. This is the third year in a row in which India and South Africa have opposed country-specific resolutions in the General Assembly and at the Commission on Human Rights, raising doubts about their commitment to a leadership role in the Democracy Caucus, which recently renewed its pledge to promote democracy and human rights.

The voting records of some newer members of the UNDC steering committee are also cause for concern. Notably, **Morocco**, **Cape Verde** and **Mongolia** all largely chose not to censure countries that are violating the human rights of their citizens. Surprisingly, **Mali**, the new Chair of the UNDC steering committee, failed to cast a vote in favor of any of the resolutions, opting instead to abstain; regrettably it voted in favor of the African-sponsored “no action motion” on the Sudan. The **Republic of Korea** abstained on three of the resolutions. **Chile**, **Mexico**, **Poland**, **Czech Republic**, **Portugal**, **El Salvador** and the **United States**, on the other hand, voted consistently with the democratic majority in supporting the winning resolutions.

Again this year, UNDC member states **Venezuela**, **Russia**, and **Bahrain** performed poorly by voting with non-democracies against or abstaining on all the resolutions. **Malaysia**, **Indonesia** and the **Philippines** joined this group in overwhelmingly rejecting or abstaining from the resolutions based on the principle of “respect for sovereignty” and “non-interference.” “We were particularly disappointed with the Philippines’ voting record this year given their candidacy to join the Community of Democracies Convening Group,” said Ted Piccone, Executive Director of the Democracy Coalition Project.

This year’s Third Committee vote on country resolutions came against the backdrop of a contentious debate on establishing a Human Rights Council to replace the discredited Commission on Human Rights. The same countries working to block consensus on creating a strong Human Rights Council, like **Russia**, **China**, **Sudan**, **Cuba**, **Zimbabwe**, **Venezuela**, **Belarus**, **Egypt** and **Pakistan**, also opposed the country-specific resolutions discussed this year.

Despite such complaints, a coalition of democratic nations is trying to win support for establishing a more robust human rights body by the end of this year. “On this anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is incumbent upon the Democracy Caucus to build on the consensus achieved at the September Summit and demonstrate strong leadership toward the goal of establishing a Human Rights Council at the U.N. by the end of this year,” stated Ted Piccone. A coalition of nongovernmental organizations is calling on governments to reach agreement by the end of this year on key features of an improved UN human rights system. See <http://www.democracycaucus.net/html/appea.html>.

To view the latest and previous scorecards, visit www.demcoalition.org, and www.democracycaucus.net.

