

Is the U.S. Prepared to Win at the UN Human Rights Council? We Just Did

Published in the HUFFPOST WORLD by Dokhi Fassihian, executive director of the Democracy Coalition Project

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Is the U.S. Prepared to Win at the UN Human Rights Council? We Just Did

Published in the HUFFPOST WORLD by Dokhi Fassihian, executive director of the Democracy Coalition Project

Posted: March 25, 2011 03:17 PM

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Authored by the United States and Sweden, the resolution was co-sponsored by over fifty countries from around the world, including Chile, the Maldives, Georgia, and Zambia, and adopted in Geneva by a vote of 22 states in favor, 7 against and 14 abstentions. High level lobbying by the United States and its partners over many months helped build broad cross-regional support for the initiative and succeeded in persuading countries like Brazil, South Korea, and Senegal to change their positions from past Iran resolutions.

Today's victory would have been impossible a few years ago, when the Bush administration chose to sit on the sidelines rather than work to strengthen the Council. The absence of the U.S. -- a traditional leader on human rights issues -- opened the way for states hostile to human rights to dominate the Council's work. It struggled under the weight of authoritarian states committed to diluting its mandate to address actual violations taking place around the world.

Without a strong US counterweight, non-democratic states such as Cuba, Algeria, China, and Pakistan joined forces to blunt the Council's work and bully other states. Scrutiny of serious human rights violations in countries like Iran, Cuba, Sri Lanka, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo were discontinued, weakened, or avoided altogether. Human rights standards and norms such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion came under attack by a cross-regional coalition of countries led by the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

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