UNDATED -- It is a familiar scene on TV: the United Nations Security Council meets to confront a global crisis. Representatives from 15 nations sit in a semi-circle using earphones for simultaneous translations of the proceedings. The 15 raise their hands to vote on resolutions that sometimes mandate the use of armed force in one of the world's trouble spots.

Five nations -- the United States, Russia, Great Britain, China, and France -- are permanent members. The other 10 rotate, serving two-year terms. The 10 non-permanent members are nominated by five regional groups -- Africa, Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and the so-called WEOG, for West European and Others group.

It is an orderly and democratic arrangement that will eventually provide every U.N. member a coveted seat on the Security Council.

Well, almost every member.

There are 185 United Nations members, and 184 are eligible for membership in one of the five regional groups. The sole exception to this otherwise universal rule is Israel. By belonging to a regional group, every U.N. member has the opportunity to sit on the Security Council except for one country that does not belong to any group: Israel, which was admitted to U.N. membership in 1949. Only Israel of the world body's 185 countries remains the perpetual wanderer.

By geography, Israel's natural regional group is Asia. But the entry of Israel has been consistently blocked by a coalition of Arab and Muslim countries. Because of this unyielding policy, it is unlikely Israel will soon
gain admittance to the Asia group.

A sensible alternative to ending Israel's isolation is WEOG membership. The letter "O" (Other) is important because it permits non-West European countries like the United States, Canada, Turkey, Australia, and New Zealand to be WEOG members.

But even within the friendly confines of WEOG, there is resistance to Israeli membership. Opponents include Spain, Portugal, Italy, Greece, and Ireland -- all countries with diplomatic relations with Israel. At the same time, the United States, Canada, Germany, Norway, and Australia are supportive of Israel's entry into WEOG and the chance to serve on the Security Council.

France, as is often the case on such matters, has not yet taken a public position on the question of Israeli membership, and while Britain wants to solve the problem, it has exerted little diplomatic energy.

Whenever WEOG members discuss the possibility of Israel joining their ranks, even on a temporary basis, the same tired argument for exclusion is advanced: Maybe this is the wrong time for Israel to join since it will adversely affect the current peace process underway in the Middle East.

Sadly, a similar stale argument was offered five years ago immediately following the famous Yitzhak Rabin-Yasser Arafat handshake on the White House lawn. Even in that period of euphoria and good will towards Israel, no action was taken by WEOG. When, if ever, is the right time?

Nor should Israeli membership in a regional group be a reward for "being good." Every other member state of the United Nations, including some non-democratic countries with dreadful human rights records, participate in all aspects of United Nations work. Only Israel has its face pressed against the window watching while the other 184 members of the world organization exercise their full rights.

Another argument is that Israeli WEOG membership would add precious waiting time before other countries could sit on the Security Council. Of course, the world has heard that refrain before, albeit in other forms: "There's no room at the inn" or "Sorry, the boat is already filled."

Interestingly, the Eastern European regional group has recently added new members including the former Soviet republics, a splintered Yugoslavia, and both the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

Concerned by the continuing exclusion and unfair treatment of Israel at the United Nations, the American Jewish Committee has during the past year mounted an aggressive public campaign to end this inequitable situation. Tens of thousands of people from the U.S. and other parts of the world have sent protests to the appropriate U.N. and WEOG officials.

Like so many other campaigns, this one will take time and considerable effort, but some positive results are already visible.

Last March, U.N. Secretary General Kofi Anan publicly spoke of the importance of finding a regional group home for Israel, and the pressure is building for Israel to become what it should have been long ago: a full member of the family of nations.

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