President Ramer Testifies

AJC has been at the forefront of efforts to end UN discrimination against Israel. AJC President Bruce Ramer recently testified on the subject before the International Relations Committee of the U.S. House of Representatives:

There is barely a body in the UN system that has not been co-opted or terrorized into adopting a resolution, special procedure, agenda item or mechanism that singles out Israel and Israel alone. We need only cite the notorious “Zionism is Racism” resolution—which Secretary General Kofi Annan has rightly termed “the low point” at the UN—to recall how viciously the truth has been turned inside out. Rescinding that resolution in 1991, 16 years after its adoption, was a beginning.

Until 1993, the General Assembly had gotten into the habit of adopting 35 resolutions annually (out of a total of some 230) addressing issues related to Israel. Up to $12 million annually was spent to finance a Division on Palestinian Rights and related public information exercises—serving as a kind of press agent for the PLO. And at bodies such as the Commission on Human Rights, a whole week at the beginning (out of six) was solely devoted to a parade of speakers denouncing Israel.

After the Oslo Accords were signed, there was some movement. It all stopped short in 1996 as Arab-Israeli tensions rose and negotiations slowed. Since then, the picture has grown dimmer:

First, a series of Emergency Sessions of the General Assembly, under the Uniting for Peace resolution, convened in 1997 and reconvened several times since over Israeli building projects in the eastern part of Jerusalem (Har Homa). Resolutions adopted in these extraordinary sessions, rare in UN history, have threatened the re-establishment of boycotts against corporations doing business with Israel, challenged the legitimacy of the State of Israel, and called for the convening of an unprecedented meeting of the States Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention regarding Israeli compliance with the Convention.

Second, the Commission on Human Rights in 1993 created a Special Rapporteur on Israeli-occupied territories which is mandated to report “until the end of the Israeli occupation of those territories.” It is the only country-specific mechanism that is not reviewed and reauthorized annually. The Commission considers Israel under a separate agenda item; the entire rest of the world is considered under another item. At the commission in 1999, five separate resolutions condemned Israel…. However the Palestinian Observer denounced the Special Rapporteur as “exceeding his mandate” when he even proposed an examination of “allegations concerning Palestinian justice.”

Third, there were changes in the European Union’s votes in this year’s session of the Human Rights Commission on a perennial resolution on “occupied Palestine” which has long called for self-determination of the Palestinian people…. The resolution did not refer to the Oslo peace process or Security Council Resolutions 242 or 338, which are the basis for the ongoing negotiations. Instead, the resolution cited General Assembly Resolution 181, the 1947 partition plan, long ago rejected by the Arab states but injected into international debates because it could change the terms of the debate over final status talks and territorial issues, such as the status of Jerusalem.
Fourth, the General Assembly agreed to upgrade the status of the Palestinians' representation closer to statehood status — as the first among UN "observers".... Secretariat officials went still further, listing the Palestinians' offices in New York in the official "Blue Book" as a "Mission" and its head as "Ambassador."

Fifth, the Rome negotiations on the International Criminal Court made a point of establishing a newly expanded definition of a "war crime" related to settlements that was deliberately aimed at Israel....

Sixth, Israel remains isolated and excluded from participation in a regional group at the UN — a condition created by the exclusionary policies of the Arab countries and certain other Muslim countries in the region, who deny Israel a place in the Asian group, Israel's natural home.... Israel has sought temporary participation in the West European and Others Group (WEOG), but is being blocked by members of the European Union, who consider the time "inappropriate" and who invent other excuses for exclusion. Absent membership in a regional group, Israel has no chance to vie for a seat on the Security Council, Economic and Social Council, and other UN bodies.... Israel, it should be noted, is the only one of the UN member states denied the right of membership in a regional group....

Bruce Ramer has announced the merger of AJC with the prestigious Geneva-based organization, UN Watch. This move broadens the international scope of our already extensive work abroad, bringing the number of our foreign "outposts" to ten.

UN Watch was established in 1993 with the assistance of the World Jewish Congress. Its founder was Amb. Morris B. Abram, who still serves as chairman. Amb. Abram, the former U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN in Geneva, is an Honorary President of AJC, having served with great distinction as AJC President during the 1960s. Michael Colson, a Canadian-born attorney, serves as executive director.

The mandate of UN Watch is to monitor the performance of the UN and its adherence to the UN Charter, particularly focusing on reform of UN management, equal rights for women in the UN, and the equal treatment of member states. Like AJC, UN Watch has been vigilant in calling attention to the double standard at the UN that discriminates against Israel. UN Watch has already helped secure the first-ever UN condemnation of anti-Semitism at the UN Commission on Human Rights and helped ensure that the Special Rapporteur on Racism has a mandate to include anti-Semitic incidents, together with other forms of contemporary racism, in the annual report.

The nine other locations around the world where AJC maintains a presence are: our offices in Jerusalem and Berlin; our correspondent in Warsaw; and our partnerships with the Asociacion Mutual Israelita Argentina (Buenos Aires), the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Committee (Melbourne and Sydney), the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic (Prague), the Institute for Jewish Policy Research (London), Tribuna Israelita (Mexico City), and the Union of Slovak Jewish Communities (Bratislava).

The American Jewish Committee Amb. Morris B. Abram, chairman of UN Watch.

Amb. Alfred H. Moses, Honorary President of AJC and former U.S. Ambassador to Romania, has been appointed Special Presidential Envoy for Cyprus by President Clinton. He succeeds Richard Holbrooke, who is the new U.S. Ambassador to the UN.

In his new role, Amb. Moses will be the principal representative of the U.S. in facilitating negotiations between the Greek and Turkish Cypriots with the aim of achieving a comprehensive settlement on Cyprus, which has been a divided island since 1974.