

Senate Committee on Foreign Relations
Chairman Richard G. Lugar
Opening Statement for Hearing on
U.N. Reform
May 25, 2006

The Foreign Relations Committee meets today to review the progress of reform at the United Nations. We are pleased to be joined by Ambassador John Bolton, who has been in the middle of the reform debate in New York. He is working hard to advance reforms that will improve the transparency and efficiency of the United Nations and safeguard against the types of ethical and financial abuses that have occurred in the recent past.

On February 6, Senator Coleman, Senator Voinovich, and I went to the United Nations at the invitation of Ambassador Bolton. He graciously arranged meetings for us with the Security Council, Ambassadors from the Group of 77, and other influential representatives. During each meeting at the U.N., we stressed that the Foreign Relations Committee remains united in its belief that the United States and the world benefit from an effective United Nations. We underscored that most Americans want the United Nations to help facilitate international burden sharing in times of crisis. They want the U.N. to be a consistent and respected forum for diplomatic discussions. And they expect the U.N. to be a positive force in the global fight against poverty, disease, and hunger.

But we emphasized that the United Nations will have great difficulty achieving these objectives if its operations are encumbered by waste, corruption, and excessive bureaucracy. Americans are deeply concerned by the Oil-for-Food scandal and the evolving investigation of kickbacks and rigged contracts in the U.N.'s own procurement division. The influence and capabilities possessed by the United Nations come from the credibility associated with countries acting together in a well-established forum with well-established rules. Profiteering, mismanagement, and bureaucratic stonewalling, squander this precious resource.

Prior to our visit, I wrote to Secretary General Kofi Annan advocating the resolute and timely implementation of ten reforms that would go far to build confidence in the United Nations. These ten reforms do not conflict with the U.N. Charter or its mission, they would improve management practices and morale, and they would enhance the U.N.'s global standing.

Several of the ten reforms have already been initiated, including the funding of an Ethics Office that will enforce lower gift limits, the establishment of a zero tolerance policy regarding sexual exploitation by U.N. personnel, the strengthening of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, the launching of a review of U.N. mandates that are more than five years old, and the creation of a whistleblower protection policy.

A number of the reforms, however, are still being discussed, including an overhaul of the U.N. procurement system to prevent bribes and kickbacks, the establishment of an oversight body that will be able to review the results of investigations, a one-time staff buy-out to allow for a more efficient use of personnel, and improvements in external access to all U.N. documents. The adoption of these reforms would not end the reform debate, nor should it. Reform cannot be treated like a one-time event. Rather, it should be an inherent part of the United Nation's operating culture.

How the United Nations addresses human rights issues is particularly important. The U.N. recently elected a Human Rights Council to replace the discredited Human Rights Commission. Assistant

Secretary of State for International Organizations, Kristen Silverberg, has said, “On the whole, we think it is an improvement over the Commission.” Nevertheless, many important U.S. objectives were not achieved with regard to the structure of the Council, and the United States declined to seek a seat this year. We look forward to hearing Ambassador Bolton’s views on the Human Rights Council. We are interested to know more about the Administration’s plans for dealing with this new body. In the absence of a seat on the Council, what is our strategy for maintaining U.S. advocacy for human rights at the United Nations? Do opportunities exist to improve the structure of the Council? What benchmarks would the Administration use to determine whether it will run for a seat next year?

We also have great interest in Ambassador Bolton’s assessment of current Security Council deliberations on Iran. The Bush Administration has been attempting to build an international coalition capable of applying economic and diplomatic pressure on Iran that could dissuade it from continuing its drive toward a nuclear weapons capability. Thus far, efforts to attain a Security Council consensus on a firm response to Iran’s intransigence have not been successful. Last week, the Foreign Relations Committee held two hearings on Iran that focused on evaluating U.S. options. Today, we are eager to continue those discussions with the benefit of Ambassador Bolton’s first-hand report on the diplomatic situation in New York.

We thank him for joining us, and we look forward to his insights.

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