

U.S. WILL SEEK TO REJOIN UNHRC: BLINKEN

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: UNO and its various Agencies

Seeking support: Antony Blinken delivering a speech via video message during the UNHRC meet on Wednesday. AFPHANDOUT

The U.S. will seek re-election to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced on Tuesday, as he “humbly” asked for the support of UN member states. This is the latest in a series of moves by the Biden administration to reverse a pattern of retreat from multilateralism that was characteristic of the Trump regime. Former President Donald Trump had taken the U.S. out of the Council in 2018, saying it was biased against Israel and had members who were human rights abusers.

While acknowledging that American democracy was “imperfect” and often fell short of its ideals, Mr. Blinken, in a video message to the 47-member Council which is currently in session, said the U.S. was placing human rights at the centre of its foreign policy and therefore seeking to rejoin the Council.

“... I'm pleased to announce the United States will seek election to the human rights council for the 2022 to 2024 term. We humbly ask for the support of all UN member States in our bid to return to a seat in this body,” Mr. Blinken said.

Mr. Blinken also alleged that the Council was biased against Israel — a position shared by Democrats and Republicans. The Secretary also referred to the Council's membership. While he praised the Council for bringing attention to the coup d'état in Myanmar, he said those with the “worst human rights record” should not be part of the Council. “We must work together to improve the work and membership of the council.”

The Secretary spoke of challenges to racial justice in the U.S. and said the fight for racial justice should be on top of the global human rights agenda. Mr. Blinken also said there was no moral equivalence between the actions of the United States and authoritarian regimes. “The United States does not claim to be perfect, but we strive every day to improve, to hold ourselves accountable, to become a more perfect union,” he said.

‘No moral equivalence’

“There's no moral equivalence between the actions of the United States, which are subject to robust, impartial, and transparent accountability mechanisms, and those of authoritarian regimes, which violate and abuse human rights with impunity. Together, we must push back against blatant attempts to subvert the values upon which the United Nations was founded...”

Mr. Blinken said those who use economic development as a reason to undermine human rights will be held accountable.

“Those who hide under the mantle of promoting economic development while seeking to undermine human rights will be held to account, including for their own human rights violations,” he said. The Secretary called for Russia to unconditionally release dissident Alexei Navalny and others wrongfully detained.

Other countries that were mentioned by name included China and Sri Lanka. “We'll speak out for universal values when atrocities are committed in Xinjiang, or when fundamental freedoms

are undermined in Hong Kong,” Mr. Blinken said.

He also called on the Council to adopt resolutions in this session, including one on Sri Lanka. “We encourage the Council to support resolutions in the session, addressing issues of concern around the world, including ongoing human rights violations in Syria, North Korea, the lack of accountability for past atrocities in Sri Lanka and the need for further investigation into the situation in South Sudan,” Mr. Blinken said. The U.K. and other countries have circulated a draft resolution asking for accountability for war crimes in Sri Lanka’s 26 year civil war.

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