

UN's human rights agenda hijacked

VIC ALHADEFF THEAUSTRALIAN 12:00AM October 6, 2009

ISRAELI foreign minister Abba Eban once jested that if a resolution was tabled at the UN that the world is flat - and that Israel flattened it - it would pass by a majority of 170-5 with 17 abstentions.

An estimated 5.4 million people have been killed in the Democratic Republic of the Congo since 1998, with 38,000 more dying every month. Yet not only are most people unaware of this, the worst toll since World War II, but there has been no hint of a General Assembly emergency session to discuss it, let alone condemn it.

The UN is mandated with the moral authority to adjudicate on matters of international concern, yet an alarming number of its agencies are headed by countries whose human rights records range from questionable to appalling, including Libya, Zimbabwe, Algeria, Sudan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Burma.

The Human Rights Council has studiously avoided condemning the brutalities in Darfur, Chechnya and Sri Lanka, but has directed 26 out of 32 resolutions condemning human rights violations against Israel.

When an NGO urged Islamic authorities to outlaw honour killings, female genital mutilation and the stoning of women, Egypt, Iran and Pakistan objected to the initiative as an "attempt to link bad practices" to Islam. The council duly ruled "evaluation of a religious creed" inadmissible.

When it convenes, the council dedicates one agenda item to abuses by Israel and another agenda item to the other 191 UN countries. What hope of sensible debate when the starting premise is skewed?

The Goldstone report in its 575 pages blithely ignored Hamas's ideology - which declares that Israel will exist only until Islam obliterates it. Nor did its executive summary breathe a word about the 10,000 rockets Hamas fired into Israel in eight years. And even though Hamas MP Fathi Hamad admitted Hamas "created a human shield of women, children, the elderly", Goldstone did "not consider it to constitute evidence".

There have been more than 400 anti-Israel resolutions in the General Assembly - more than against all other UN nations combined - and six emergency sessions on Israel. None on Rwanda, Darfur or the maltreatment of women in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan.

The institution of the UN is vital. The extent to which it has been hijacked has reached crisis point, however. The imperative to tackle human rights issues is thus subsumed by anti-democratic agendas. It falls to the democracies among us to haul this once-august body back on track.

Vic Alhadeff is chief executive of the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies.

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FIONA HAMILTON, BILLY KENBER

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GRAHAM LLOYD

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