



**CHAIRMAN ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN**

**Remarks at Weyrich Lunch on H.R. 2829, the United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act**

**October 25, 2011**

Chairman Blackwell, thanks very much to you and to the sponsors of this lunch for inviting me to join you today. It's an honor to speak with conservative leaders like yourselves who have worked tirelessly to make America stronger, safer, more prosperous, and free.

I've been pursuing the same goals on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, most recently as Chairman. And those goals bring me here today, to talk to you about the United Nations Transparency, Accountability, and Reform Act, H.R. 2829, which I introduced in August.

For decades, leading conservatives have been sounding the alarm about the threat posed to our nation's interests by the United Nations. You know what the problem is with the UN: It consumes more and more and more of our U.S. taxpayer dollars every year, and then uses our money to pay for activities that undermine U.S. interests and values.

I'll just note a couple quick examples. Last year, according to the OMB, the U.S. contributed a record \$7.7 billion to the UN, 20 percent more than the previous year's total, which had also been a record. Now, what do Americans get in return for all that money? We get a UN Human Rights Council whose membership includes Cuba as vice-chair, as well as China, Russia, and Saudi Arabia, and that spends much of its time ignoring real human rights abuses and bashing Israel instead. We get a Conference on Disarmament recently chaired by Cuba and North Korea. We get a Commission on the Status of Women that grants membership to Iran, which stones women to death. We get UN development agencies that are building up large cash reserves, and when they do spend their funds, it's often tainted by corruption or mismanagement. We get multiple UN agencies that are poised to recognize a "Palestinian state" by granting membership to the PLO.

And now, even as the U.S. and other countries are tightening their belts, the UN plans to increase its upcoming two-year budget by another 2 percent, including a pay raise for UN bureaucrats. Keep in mind, the UN budget has more than doubled over the past decade—and U.S. contributions to the UN have likewise skyrocketed. Even the Obama Administration admitted the UN's uncontrolled spending increases was business as usual for the UN.

The reason we pay so much, and get such backwards results in return, is because at the UN, the main source of budgetary funding are mandatory, assessed contributions. The countries that call the shots don't have to pay the bills. Two thirds of the member countries pay, combined, less than one percent of the UN's budget. They can vote together to pass budgets and programming decisions, and then they pass the costs on to big donors like the U.S.

We're assessed 22 percent of the UN budget, while China, for example, is assessed 3 percent, and Cuba's assessed less than one-tenth of one percent. And because the Administration pays our dues in full, with no strings attached, we surrender our strongest leverage to actually stop terrible things at the UN and promote good things. We keep saying "Reform," but there is no "or else."

We can complain all we want about the UN's flaws, but as long as other countries and UN bureaucrats know that we will pay every cent of our dues, no matter what, there is no incentive to reform. At the UN, the deck is stacked against us. We need a game-changer, and I believe that's the UN reform bill I introduced and that currently enjoys the support of close to 140 Republican Members.

The UN Reform bill ties our funding to the UN on a number of vital reforms. The most important reform is one strongly advocated by Ambassador John Bolton: Shifting the funding basis for the UN budget from assessed to voluntary contributions, so that American taxpayers can choose how much of their hard-earned money goes to the UN and what it's spent on. A shift to voluntary funding will help end the UN's entitlement culture, forcing UN bodies to perform better and cut costs in order to justify their budgets in a competitive funding environment—basic free market principles.

The bill also requires UN bodies to provide—and comply with—written commitments to meet basic standards of transparency and accountability. I've been pressing the issue of UN reform for many years, but the ongoing Palestinian campaign for UN recognition is drawing more attention to this issue than we've seen in years. And the bill seeks to stop the PLO's statehood scheme by using the same formula that the George H.W. Bush Administration used to stop a similar scheme by Arafat in 1989:

Cutting funding to any UN agency that upgrades the status of the PLO. The U.S. will stop the Security Council from granting full UN membership to "Palestine," but the PLO is seeking membership or other upgraded status in other UN forums, like UNESCO, where they have the votes and we have no veto.

So the time has never been more right for this bill. That's why our Foreign Affairs Committee marked it up and passed it by a strong margin two weeks ago. We will report it out formally in the next week and a half so we have a limited timeframe to add co-sponsors.

This is where your influence and activism is key. We need your help in getting more cosponsors and encouraging Members to vote for it on the Floor.

So thank you for giving me the opportunity to discuss this with you. I hope you'll support this bill and help us further increase its momentum toward adoption by the full House, and swift introduction of a Senate companion to keep up the pressure.