

September 13, 2011

The Honorable Ileana Ros-Lehtinen
2206 Rayburn House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Ros-Lehtinen:

We write to express our opposition to H.R. 2829, the United Nations Transparency, Accountability and Reform Act. We agree that the UN needs to continue to make itself more accountable, responsible and effective as an institution; UN reform is in all of our interests, but we disagree that H.R. 2829 is the right way to advance UN reform.

As you know, across the globe the United States and United Nations are working together to address some of the world's most pressing issues—from the humanitarian needs of those in the Horn of Africa and Haiti, to political crises in Libya and South Sudan, to the ongoing violence in Iraq and Afghanistan. At a time when U.S. and UN leadership and engagement are critical to addressing these and other complex global challenges, this legislation takes us in the wrong direction. By failing to take account of the real world consequences of forfeiting our standing at the UN, enactment of H.R. 2829 would undermine America's national security, foreign policy, and economic interests and likely lead to even greater costs to American taxpayers. It would also send the wrong message to our friends and allies around the world at a time when such partnerships are vitally important.

Perhaps the most significant way in which H.R. 2829 would harm U.S. interests and our standing in the UN is its requirement that the U.S. withhold 50% of our obligated payments unless most UN funding is changed from assessed dues to voluntary contributions. The likelihood of such a change occurring is exceedingly slim given the strong opposition from even our closest allies throughout Europe and Asia. More important, shifting to voluntary funding is not in our national interest because assessed contributions are critical to the overall UN mission, which the United States has long supported. By maintaining this system, stable predictable funding is guaranteed for many core activities that are directly in the interest of the United States. For example, the rest of the world pays almost 80% of the bill for the critical UN political missions in Iraq and Afghanistan. These missions are working to stabilize those countries so U.S. troops can come home. Reneging on our current obligations, which this legislation effectively mandates, in order to switch to voluntary funding would potentially leave us to fully fund such missions at much greater cost than we currently pay.

Even worse, reneging on our current obligations would erode our international legitimacy and harm our ability to pursue key foreign policy goals at the UN, such as defending Israel. The Israeli government, which pays its obligations and is fully engaged at the UN, has repeatedly indicated that it also wants the U.S. to remain fully engaged in order to fight against anti-Israel sentiment. At the Human Rights Council, where United States engagement has made a significant positive difference, withdrawing funding will mean ceding ground to states willing to make such investments to undermine both Israel and a stronger human rights system. In addition,

America's ability to get other members of the Security Council to impose tough new sanctions on Iran – a key foreign policy objective we share with Israel – will be damaged if we do not pay our UN dues in full.

H.R. 2829 also calls for a moratorium on new or expanded UN peacekeeping missions, even though already no peacekeeping mission can be created or expanded without express U.S. support in the Security Council. These missions support stability, the transition to democratization, and bring relief for hundreds of millions of people. While some of the legislation's proposed recommendations are laudable, indiscriminately hitting the pause button on peacekeeping operations until certain unrealistic reforms are met undermines our own interests. Conflict and crisis do not wait for reforms to happen. For example, it would be both ironic and tragic, after all the effort both Republican and Democratic Administrations have put into ensuring peace in South Sudan, if passage of this legislation prevents any changes or altogether ends the peacekeeping missions in South Sudan and Abyei at the very moment the South Sudanese are struggling to establish a new nation.

Further, according to the Government Accountability Office, UN peacekeeping, in which other countries carry the burden of providing troops, is eight times less expensive than fielding a comparable U.S. force. U.N. peacekeeping has also been shown to bolster GDP growth in conflict-affected areas and is proven to reduce the likelihood of resurgence of conflict. By decreasing the likelihood of further conflict, the presence of the missions naturally decrease the likelihood that additional U.S. resources would be necessary either for military or humanitarian purposes – key considerations in this difficult economic climate.

The reality is reforms and accountability come from engagement, not estrangement. The decision by the Obama Administration and Congress to pay UN dues in full over the past few years has made it easier for the U.S. to push for major reforms including strengthening UN oversight and ethics rules and streamlining peacekeeping field operations. Of course, more must be done, but with 192 member states, we cannot expect progress overnight or without setbacks. But much of this forward progress will be lost, as will the United States' ability to advance reform that best serves our interests, if the U.S. loses its legitimacy and seat at the UN by withholding payments. When the U.S. focuses primarily on withholding funds and ending its involvement in various programs, it sends a strong and provocative message that we are more interested in tearing down the UN than making it better and it results in countries aligning against us.

Over the last few years, with Congress paying our dues in full, we have been able to work within the UN to move forward both on important reforms and on promoting and protecting American national interests. We urge you to stay this course. It is our firm belief that H.R. 2829 would stall reform efforts and potentially lead to greater U.S. expenditures while harming our relationships with allies, other nations and peoples at a time when they need us most.

Sincerely,

- *Americans for UNFPA*
- *Better World Campaign*
- *Center for War/Peace Studies*
- *Citizens for Global Solutions*
- *EarthAction and 2020 Action*
- *Federation of American Women's Clubs' Overseas*
- *Foreign Policy In Focus*
- *Genocide Intervention Network/Save Darfur Coalition*
- *Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and United Church of Christ*
- *Global Rights*
- *Heifer International*
- *International Rescue Committee*
- *Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns*
- *Mercy Corps*
- *Open Society Policy Center*
- *Operation USA*
- *Physicians for Human Rights*
- *Population Action International*
- *President, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*
- *Refugees International*
- *The African Medical and Research Foundation*
- *The Hunger Project*
- *The Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy*
- *U.S. National Committee for UN Women*
- *UNA-NCA*
- *UNA-USA*
- *United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society*
- *United States Council for International Business (USCIB)*
- *Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, U.S. Section*