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One Hundred Ninth Congress

Congress of the United States
Committee on International Relations

House of Representatives
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Via Facsimile

The Honorable Condoleezza Rice
The Secretary of State
U.S. Department of State
2201 C. Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Madam Secretary:

We are writing to express our firm conviction that the United States should present its candidacy for the new Human Rights Council and make every effort to be elected on May 9th.

Yesterday, we visited United Nations headquarters in New York as part of a delegation from the House Committee on International Relations. In the course of our discussions with Secretary General Kofi Annan, Ambassador John Bolton, other permanent representatives from various countries, and the media, we heard repeatedly of the need for the United States to be engaged with the Human Rights Council.

Numerous elements of the Council are weak and deeply flawed. The majority requirement for elections, as opposed to two-thirds, will open the door to possible membership by notorious human rights violators. The Western Regional Group will be less influential with fewer votes. Special sessions targeting Israel, the United States and other countries can be called by only one-third of the Council's membership. And the new Council is mandated to promote the goals and commitments "emanating" from United Nations conferences and summits, which will potentially lead to the treatment of ill-conceived and defined policy measures on the same par as human rights treaty obligations. Thus, it remains to be seen whether the Council will be a meaningful improvement over the Commission on Human Rights.

Yet despite these serious considerations, and arguably because of them, we agree that it will be important for the United States to be a member in the Council's initial phase. Our participation is also important to demonstrate that the United States has no intention of isolating itself on the critical issue of international human rights. While it is important for the United States to take a firm and principled position on the necessity of achieving authentic reform at the United Nations, such a strategy must not be pursued at the cost of excluding the United States from on-going negotiations and developments.

Sincerely,

HENRY J. HYDE
Chairman
Committee on International Relations

CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
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