



# A RETURN TO MULTILATERALISM

## THE ISSUE:

For decades, Republican and Democratic presidents have turned to the United Nations to resolve issues of war and peace, tackle human rights abuses around the world, and facilitate assistance to communities reeling from natural and human-made calamities. In doing so, the U.S. helped cobble together functioning coalitions that, however imperfectly, have managed to tackle some of the world's biggest challenges. The previous years have marked a departure from this multilateral approach.

The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) and the General Assembly set international human rights standards. The HRC holds member states accountable through periodic reviews of their human rights records. The Council's [Universal Periodic Review](#) mechanism provides a forum wherein each Member State's human rights performance is examined every four and a half years. Independent human rights experts – known as [Special Procedures](#) – collect first-hand accounts from officials and survivors during their country visits and intervene on individual cases and patterns of allegations of human rights violations. Among other efforts, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights ([OHCHR](#)) provides technical expertise and capacity-building to governments around the world on protecting human rights. UN peacekeepers deploy to areas of conflict around the world and play a key role in protecting civilians, monitoring and reporting on violations and preventing additional waves of violence.

Recent actions by the U.S. have indicated a growing antagonism to multilateral engagement on human rights. US officials have repeatedly put forward retrograde and harmful language on [LGBTI rights and sexual and reproductive human rights \(SRHR\)](#), not least of all by undermining progress at the Commission on the Status of Women and the General Assembly. In June 2018, the U.S. formally [withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council](#). In November 2019, the U.S. formally moved to withdraw from the [Paris Climate Agreement](#), an international compact to strengthen the world's response to climate change. The White House has waged a public campaign against the International Criminal Court (ICC), attempting to thwart the court's investigation into war crimes in Afghanistan by [slapping visa restrictions](#) on the staff and [threatening their families](#).

It need not be this way. U.S. diplomacy has previously played a key role in condemning human rights violations around the world and

## THE HUMAN COST:

Climate change will impact [all people](#) in all corners of the world. Without action to combat the threat, it is expected to account for a quarter million deaths due to disease between 2030 and 2050. It will drastically increase the number of people suffering from hunger and displaced by flooding. According to [a poll](#) of over 10,000 young people ages 18-25 by Amnesty International, climate change was cited most frequently as the most important issue facing the world. Galvanized by the gravity of the threat, [189 state parties have ratified](#) the Paris Agreement, an ambitious deal to curb global greenhouse gas emissions. In November 2019, the White House formally moved to [exit the Paris Agreement](#). The U.S. remains the world's second largest contributor to carbon emissions.

extending the mandates of special rapporteurs to countries whose governments have disastrous rights records, such as Belarus and Eritrea. The U.S. must build on these achievements and reverse recent policies that have undermined multilateral progress on human rights.

## TALKING POINTS:

- From climate change to the COVID-19 pandemic, the world is facing problems that cannot be solved by governments acting alone. It will be the policy of the White House to reengage in multilateralism – at the UN and beyond – to find lasting solutions.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The White House should:
  - ◇ Cease the introduction of hostile language on gender equality, LGBTI rights, and SRHR in multilateral bodies, including the UN General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).
  - ◇ Immediately rejoin the Paris Climate Agreement and commit the U.S. to living up to all of the agreement's terms. Withdraw all restrictions targeting ICC staff and reaffirm the US signature of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.
  - ◇ Sign, push for Senate ratification of, and develop a plan for full compliance with outstanding UN human rights treaties. To date, the U.S. has signed and ratified fewer international human rights treaties than many countries including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, and Iran.
  - ◇ Nominate Americans for a seat on relevant UN human rights treaty bodies. U.S. diplomatic representatives are currently eligible for a seat on the three treaty bodies that oversee compliance with the Convention Against Torture (UNCAT), International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

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