

**Statement of Ambassador Michele J. Sison
Assistant Secretary of State for
International Organization Affairs
House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on International Development,
International Organizations and Global Corporate Social Impact
February 15, 2022**

Good afternoon, and thank you, Chairman Castro, Ranking Member Malliotakis, and members of the Subcommittee for having me here today to discuss “Renewed American Engagement with International Organizations: Goals, Priorities, and Successes.”

President Biden has made clear that we will put our core U.S. values at the center of our foreign policy. This means we must actively out-compete efforts by nations that stand in opposition to U.S. values on human rights, democracy, labor rights, and transparent economic practices. To achieve this, we must work in partnership with other nations; our nation is stronger when we lead the way in crafting strategic, cross-regional partnerships.

In my short time as Assistant Secretary for International Organization Affairs I can state with real confidence that the multilateral world becomes more complex, more active, and more important with each passing year.

I make that observation not just in the context of my prior tenure in New York as the U.S. Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN but based on decades of interacting with UN agencies on the ground and serving alongside UN teams in places like:

- Togo, Benin, Cameroon, and Cote d’Ivoire, where the UN’s development activities have been crucial;
- Iraq, where the UN is working to advance inclusive political dialogue and coordinate humanitarian and sustainable development efforts;
- India and Pakistan, which have for years been at -- or near -- the top of the list of countries contributing troops to UN peacekeeping operations;
- Lebanon, where the UN has been deeply engaged for decades in peacekeeping and peacebuilding efforts;

- Sri Lanka, where actions in the UN Human Rights Council are contributing to reconciliation, accountability, and renewed respect for human rights; and
- Haiti, where I most recently served as U.S. Ambassador, and where the UN is broadly and actively engaged in supporting all aspects of Haitian peace, security, humanitarian needs, and development.

I have seen across my career the reality that the UN and other international organizations are becoming increasingly engaged in all corners of our globe, and with growing relevance to the urgent challenges our world faces.

That was the driving force behind the President's determination to restore U.S. leadership in multilateral spaces and reaffirm our commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Over the last year, that determination has played out in concrete ways:

- we rejoined the Paris Agreement, and have expanded U.S. leadership on climate matters, including at COP26 in Glasgow;
- we recommitted to the World Health Organization and are actively engaged in reforming and strengthening its capacity to support global health security including responding to COVID-19 and future pandemic threats and other health emergencies;
- we are leading by example as the largest national contributor to COVAX, and providing more than 400 million doses of vaccines to 110 countries around the world, with no political strings attached;
- we put human rights back at the center of U.S. foreign policy by reengaging with the UN Human Rights Council;
- we pledged an unprecedented \$10 billion dollars in multi-year initiatives to strengthen global food security; and
- we are working as never before to increase the number of qualified Americans in leadership positions across the international system.

The Biden-Harris administration has made clear that we are not simply *returning* to international organizations – we are *restoring* American leadership

to promote and protect American interests and values.

Our strong, principled leadership and the alliances we are building with traditional and new, emerging partners are key in safeguarding multilateral institutions from those, such as the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, that seek to bend the UN system to their authoritarian agendas.

We need the UN at its best. That means a UN dedicated to its founding ideals, and committed to transparency, accountability, and a culture of reform.

A UN that rejects anti-Israel bias, anti-Semitism, and racism in all its forms -- a UN that promotes the universality of human rights, humanitarian principles, sustainable development, and cooperation among nations.

A UN that allows meaningful participation for Taiwan, and embraces – not excludes – the active, meaningful participation of civil society voices.

And, crucially, we need a UN that can demonstrate real benefit to the American people. There is a line of thought that the United States pays too much to multilateral organizations for too little return.

That mindset is understandable, because we as a government have not always successfully explained or translated the impact of those investments for the American public.

Secretary of State Blinken has directed his team at the State Department to begin addressing that disconnect with renewed purpose - and for the IO Bureau I lead, that means talking with Americans about:

- how cooperation through the International Telecommunication Union supports U.S. economic growth by contributing to the connectivity and interoperability of global telecommunications networks – wiring the world in a way that is open and free,
- how our leadership at the World Intellectual Property Organization protects American patents and copyrights – and thus our jobs and livelihood;
- how our multilateral work supports standards for food safety that help American farmers sell their food around the world – so they are not forced to compete with cheaper products because corners were cut; and

- how UN diplomacy, supported by international partners, can avert and mitigate tensions that can lead to protracted conflicts and unspeakable human suffering; and
- how peacekeepers provide stability and create space for reconciliation, which reduces the risk of broadening conflict.

It's also about:

- promoting international labor standards that allow American companies to compete on a more level playing field;
- international controls on fentanyl to deny drug traffickers the raw materials needed to replenish their supply;
- the promotion and protection of human rights as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- and much more.

I'd like to spend a moment on that last point, given that in January the United States assumed an elected seat for a three-year term on the UN Human Rights Council.

The first session since we joined starts February 28th, with much ahead for us to accomplish, including:

- renewing Special Rapporteurs on Iran, Burma, and North Korea, and the Commission of Inquiry on Syria;
- supporting resolutions reinforcing the freedom of religion or belief, the human rights of members of minority groups and persons with disabilities; and
- highlighting other country-specific human rights crises, including in Belarus, South Sudan, and Nicaragua.

At the same time, any discussion of the HRC must of course also recognize its persistent, corrosive anti-Israel bias – a bias that the administration has committed

to confront aggressively wherever and whenever it appears.

That means being at the table to advocate on Israel's behalf, working with friends and allies, as well as with non-traditional partners.

It means engaging continually with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and HRC member states to make clear U.S. opposition to problematic anti-Israel mandates, including the open-ended Commission of Inquiry.

It means redoubled efforts to build a community of member states that is ready to finally tackle this total waste of the Council's time -- including by minimizing and eventually eliminating Agenda Item 7 and other resolutions that unfairly target Israel.

It means working thoughtfully with regional groupings over months and years to reshape the Council's membership, so those who violate and abuse human rights -- such as the PRC, Russia, Cuba, and Venezuela -- are no longer able to occupy these important positions on the Human Rights Council.

It means leading by example, and welcoming scrutiny of our own human rights record to demonstrate to the world that all countries should be held to the highest human rights ideals.

I also want to emphasize the IO Bureau's ongoing efforts to promote racial equity and justice across our multilateral initiatives.

Leading also means out-competing countries that misuse the UN, diminish its effectiveness, or contort its purposes. Much can be said about the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation in this context.

I strongly believe that the UN and other international organizations are venues where our respective and often contrasting visions of global leadership are displayed – and where it is critical we assertively promote our values and the international rules-based order.

For example, the PRC seeks to use the UN to promote and extend its ideologies and policies, including the problematic Belt and Road Initiative -- and now its Global Development Initiative.

The PRC's actions to bully, coerce, and undermine the UN's foundational principle of sovereign equality. PRC attacks on rules, values, and standards undermine core UN purposes and principles, particularly respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms.

We're working hard to push back on PRC actions and present our own affirmative view of a strong UN working in our and our partners' interests for the global good.

For example, we are sharply focused on appointments or elections of qualified, independent U.S. and like-minded candidates to leadership positions in the UN system.

We have some recent successes:

- In October, Professor Todd Buchwald was elected to the UN's Committee Against Torture;
- In November, Jeffrey Mounts was reelected to the International Civil Service Commission;
- In December, Professor Justin Hansford was elected to serve on the UN Permanent Forum on People of African Descent; and
- On February 1st, Ambassador Cathy Russell began her tenure as the new Executive Director of UNICEF.

In addition, U.S. support for the campaign of Doreen Bogdan-Martin to become the next Secretary-General of the International Telecommunication Union features the active participation of several cabinet agencies and a host of private sector entities committed to a future of effective, transparent, and innovative leadership of that important body.

In closing, the IO bureau supports strong U.S. leadership at the UN and across multilateral venues to advance our U.S. national interests, protect the American people, promote U.S. prosperity and core values, and drive the reforms needed to

ensure the effectiveness of international organizations to promote international peace and security.

We look hard at UN and international organization management and budgeting practices and will make sure that U.S. taxpayer dollars are well-spent with regard to our multilateral contributions.

We continue to insist on effective UN peacekeeping operations that advance political solutions and have realistic and achievable mandates.

And of course, I look forward to consulting with you as we work together to meet the challenges of today's strategic competition – and as we prove that respect for human rights, transparency, and democratic norms can and will prevail.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you, and I welcome your questions.