



Mission permanente d'Israël
auprès de l'Office des Nations Unies
et des Organisations Internationales à Genève

משלחת ישראל
ליד משרד האומות המאוחדות
והארגונים הבינלאומיים בג'נבה

Statement by H.E. Ambassador Itzhak Levanon
Permanent Representative

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Human Rights Council

General Debate
Agenda Item 7

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Mr. President,

It was gratifying to see in her latest report, A/HRC/8/17, the High Commissioner endeavored to stretch beyond the very narrow confines placed on her by those who authored and voted in favor of Resolution 7/1. By choosing *not* to focus solely on Israel, but choosing *also* to detail the obligations and violations of the Palestinians under both humanitarian and human rights law, the High Commissioner's office set a new precedent for the Human Rights Council: the possibility of a balanced consideration of what neutral observers can acknowledge is a complex situation.

Of course, this Council is not made up of neutral observers. It is made up of political representatives who spend significant time and effort advancing political agendas that are often unrelated to the issue at hand. Certainly, any honest discussion of the situation in our region is prevented by those who fear a frank assessment of their own human rights record. They are aided in their task by the treachery the Council members permitted when they did not prevent the inclusion of a special, country-specific Agenda Item in the form of Item 7.

Mr. President,

Regarding the question of religious and cultural rights in Israel raised by the High Commissioner today, and for those who insist on approaching this issue through the jaded and politicized prism of Item 7, I would like to present the following historical facts for the record:

In 1967, Israel adopted the law regarding protection of the holy places in Jerusalem of *all* religions, without any exception. The law stipulates that (quote) "*holy places shall be protected from desecration and any other violation and from anything likely to violate the freedom of access of the members of the different religions...whosoever desecrates or otherwise violates a holy place shall be liable to imprisonment for a term of seven years.*" (end quote)

Mr. President,

Israel has always been committed to the safeguarding of sites which have cultural, religious or historical significance. Perhaps if the Palestinians had similar values, they would have prevented the destruction of Jewish shrines such as Joseph's Tomb in 2000. Or they would permit Israel to restore all the synagogues the Palestinians burned in Gaza after Israel's complete withdrawal from that territory in 2005.

For decades Israel has guaranteed the protection and freedom of access to holy sites for all religions, at times at the expense of its own security considerations. For the decades Jerusalem was under foreign rule, Jews were prevented from praying at the sole Jewish Shrine, the Western Wall. Needless to say that there has never been a resolution brought in this body to rectify *this* historical wrong. And, given the track record of this Council during its first two years and the existence of Item 7, I daresay there never will be.

Mr. President,

Unless and until member states of the United Nations commit themselves to approaching the Israeli-Palestinian question in an equitable, non-politicized and even-handed manner, we are doomed to sit here and engage in circular and repetitive debates for the foreseeable future. Israel has never asked to be exempt from critique of its human rights record. We simply ask to be judged by the same standards and on equal footing as every other country in this room and according to the same universal principles this Council is supposed to perpetuate. Item 7, then, has no legitimate reason to exist and should be deleted immediately.

Thank you.