

# Dick Lugar

## U.S. Senator for Indiana

Contact: Andy Fisher • 202-224-2079 • Date: 3/15/2006  
<http://lugar.senate.gov> • [andy\\_fisher@lugar.senate.gov](mailto:andy_fisher@lugar.senate.gov)

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### Lugar Statement on Human Rights Council Vote

*U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Dick Lugar released the following statement on the vote today in the General Assembly on the new United Nations Human Rights Council. The vote was 170-4-3. Nations voting No were the United States, Israel, Palau and the Marshall Islands. The three nations that abstained were Belarus, Iran, and Venezuela. Statement:*

For years the United Nations Human Rights Commission has been a discredited mechanism more aimed at hindering rather than promoting human rights around the globe. I was therefore particularly pleased to see the prominence the reform of the Commission into a Human Rights Council was given in the overall UN Reform debate and included it among my own Top Ten list of needed reforms.

The crux of the difficulties surrounding the Commission focused on the membership, particularly of those nations who clearly did not value democracy and the rule of law. In order to address this, many – including both U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and U.S. Ambassador John Bolton – proposed a voting requirement of two-thirds of the General Assembly. The U.S. also sought to have any nation currently under Security Council sanction for human rights violations barred from membership. Sadly, neither of these sensible proposals were adopted in the end.

Instead, the proposed Council will require an absolute majority vote of the U.N. General Assembly – thus, at least 96 votes – rather than a majority of the 54 members present and voting of the U.N.'s Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), as the Commission is currently elected.

While this 96-vote bar is thus not as high as the two-thirds the Administration had pushed for, it is important to recognize it as a significant first step in stiffening membership requirements. Equally important is the new requirement that each country must be voted on individually, regardless of the number of nations proposed by each regional group. Previously, if a group proposed a so-called “clean slate” with seven nations for its seven allotted seats, the group was adopted by consensus. This often enabled the worst of the worst to become members of the Commission without a vote. Now, regardless of a clean slate or not, each nation will have to stand on its own before the world, with the hoped for result that, using our skilled diplomats in New York and in capitals throughout the world, the true malefactors will not receive the necessary 96 votes.

I want to applaud those nations, including the European Union, who have agreed with us that there must be a “red-line” for membership and that those nations sanctioned by the Security Council should be barred from membership of the new Council. Their public pledge not to support the membership aspirations of any nation so-sanctioned will serve as a model for other nations to emulate and sign on to.

In spite of the Administration's frustration that these two provisions were not included, I believe the new Council is a good start to re-energizing international focus on human rights. I was therefore pleased to see that, in spite of our formal opposition to the Council, we have accepted the budget for the Council. The United States must remain engaged in the debate given our history of support for human rights, and I urge the Administration, having now voiced its frustration with the Council, to get on with the job of promoting human rights – a job that can best be achieved by seeking election to the new Council.

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