

Statement of Sarah E. Mendelson
Nominee for Representative of the United States of America
On the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations
Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 9, 2015

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, distinguished Members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you as President Obama's nominee to be the United States Representative to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations. I am grateful to President Obama, Secretary Kerry, and Ambassador Power for this opportunity and for their confidence in me.

I would like to acknowledge my husband John Harvey who is here with me today, and whose career has been defined by public service and the safeguarding of US national security interests. I depend every day on his love and support. I also want to acknowledge my family and friends watching from many different parts of the globe. As a first generation American, it is truly an honor and privilege to be here. In my office, I have a photograph of the shtetl in Lithuania where my father was born, which serves as a reminder of how far and fast my family's journey has been.

Virtually my entire professional career has focused on advocating for democracy and human rights internationally. This work is not easy, and nor does it bring quick results. I keep close a copy of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In a world filled with cynicism, it is an important reminder of the United Nations' potential. I know first-hand about the UN's imperfections: while at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, my intellectual home of many years, I investigated the trafficking of women and girls in and around peacekeeping missions in Bosnia and Kosovo. But this work also brought me into contact with brave UN officers dedicated to advancing gender equality and human rights.

I have seen firsthand that when the United Nations works best, we can effectively work with partners to promote our interests and values. During the four years I served at USAID in the Bureau for Democracy, Conflict, and Humanitarian Assistance, my colleagues and I responded to multiple Level-3 humanitarian crises. I was exposed on a daily basis to the development, human rights, humanitarian assistance, peacebuilding, and democracy promotion challenges confronting various UN agencies, nearly all of which depend on vital US leadership and support.

My service in government also coincided with the expansion of the digital era. From Brazil to Indonesia, from Mexico to South Africa, the spread of affordable information and communication technologies has helped to expose corruption and driven demand for governments to be more transparent and accountable to their citizens. Initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership, launched by President Obama and seven other heads of state at the UN in 2011, reflect this growing international movement of civic-based activism.

This digital era has been met with a backlash, a closing of public space around civil society where governments are threatened by the increased empowerment of citizens. There are many dimensions to closing space including onerous requirements on nongovernmental organizations,

the targeting of journalists, national legal measures targeting the LGBT community, the rise of anti-Semitism and targeting of religious minorities, and the murder of activists dedicated to exposing abuse. President Obama addressed government restrictions on civil society during the high-level week at the UN General Assembly in 2013 and 2014. The UN Human Rights Council adopted resolutions on the issue in 2013 and 2014. I know from my travels around Africa, Asia, Europe, Eurasia, and Latin America just how much members of vulnerable and marginalized populations look to the United States and the United Nations for leadership in pushing back on such repression. If confirmed, I pledge to work with UN agencies and like-minded member states to mobilize support for and address this issue and give voice to those who have been silenced.

If confirmed, I will also continue the work I began over 15 years ago on human trafficking, elevating the need to combat modern slavery as a vital 21st century development challenge. The global movement has made great strides, yet as this Committee has recognized under the Chairman's leadership, there is more work to be done to strengthen international efforts to address human trafficking. The US role, as this Committee has also noted, is critical. The UN has an important role to play as a platform to expand and broaden constituencies engaged in ending slavery.

If confirmed, I will work with the leadership of UN agencies in New York to combat human trafficking, and support smart investments that lead to sound development outcomes and elevate the focus on women and girls. I will work with colleagues across the UN system to deliver assistance to those experiencing food insecurity and displacement, and join others in the quest for greater resilience in the face of disaster. As the world finalizes its commitments for the Post-2015 Development Agenda, I will work with the leadership of UN agencies, funds, programs, and member states for meaningful implementation of the goals. We must never forget that inclusion, sound governance, sustainable environmental practices, and respect for human rights are the essential foundations for achieving and sustaining development.

And, finally, across the full spectrum of the issues and activities in my portfolio, I will contribute actively to this Administration's fight against the disproportionate bias that remains persistent in the UN-system targeting Israel.

If confirmed, I would be honored to join the Administration's commitment and efforts to make the United Nations live up to its potential and further American values and ideals. Working with this Committee, and others in the Administration, I would do my utmost to help the UN address humanitarian challenges and meet opportunities to make the world more secure.

Thank you. I look forward to answering your questions.