

documents resulting from U.N. conferences. Treaties are negotiated by U.N. member states, and they may or may not be subsequently ratified through the established approval process of each country. Those states that do ratify a treaty thereby agree to be bound by its provisions under international law. U.N. conference documents, on the other hand, are the result of policy debates and are agreed to by consensus at the end of the conference. These consensus documents are not negotiated as legally-binding instruments and are not subject to a ratification process. They do not have, and should not have, the same legal authority as treaties.

For this reason, the U.N. General Assembly was extremely misguided when it assigned the Human Rights Council the task of promoting these conference commitments. By doing so, it threatens to diminish the moral and legal persuasiveness of internationally-recognized human rights by equating them with mere policy directives. Even more troubling, the resolution calls for the promotion of human rights "emanating" from the U.N. conferences. The very word "emanating" implies that a characteristic or action need not be clearly defined in a conference document in order for the Council to undertake its promotion. This, together with the fact that these conference documents are consensus documents, raises the specter that any number of characteristics or actions may slide their way into the international human rights framework without the ratified agreement of countries who would then be pressured to abide by their provisions. Such a gaping loophole in the international legal process is antithetical to the democratic ideals of our own country and to the principles on which the United Nations is based.

This potential for the gross abuse of the United Nations human rights mechanisms is already being realized with respect to the issue of abortion. For several years now, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, the Human Rights Committee and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights have been pressuring governments to legalize abortion even though no U.N. human rights treaty addresses the issue. These and other treaty bodies pursue this ideological agenda while ignoring the fact that abortion exploits women and is an act of violence against children. Just two weeks ago, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women published "concerns" about the illegality of abortion in Chile, Mauritius and the Philippines. In October 2005, the Human Rights Committee decided in a case from Peru presented to it under the ICCPR Optional Protocol that denying access to an abortion violates women's human rights. It made no reference to the unborn child's right to life and to be free from the terrifying effect of an array of child killing poisons currently on the market or dismemberment.

Even the Committee against Torture, which is responsible for monitoring compliance with the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, is joining this assault on the unborn. In February of this year, pursuant to its review of Peru's compliance with the Convention, the Committee concluded that Peru's "omission" in failing to provide abortion constitutes "cruel and inhuman acts." The Committee has no basis in the Convention for challenging a state party's refusal to provide an

abortion. However, if one were to concede that the Committee is warranted in examining the issue of abortion under Article 16, then the Committee should have no choice but to conclude that the chemical poisoning and dismemberment of the fragile, sensitive body of an unborn child is itself a "cruel and inhuman act." (And now we know that unborn children feel pain at least at 20 weeks gestation—perhaps earlier, which is why I have introduced the Unborn Child Pain Awareness Act.)

In many of their decisions, these treaty bodies do not refer to the text of the treaty they are supposed to be monitoring, but to documents adopted at U.N. conferences. They do so out of necessity, since the countries they are pressuring have never agreed to legalize or provide for the destruction of the life of the unborn in the instruments that they have ratified. Based on this entrenched and growing manipulation of the U.N. human rights mechanisms to promote abortion, there is reason to believe that the Human Rights Council will also be co-opted into promoting ideological agendas at variance with the established human rights norms of the international community.

The skepticism generally about the ability of the Human Rights Council to promote human rights and address human rights violations, and to do so in a fair and equal manner, has increased with the election of its members and subsequent activity. Although the General Assembly resolution states that its members must take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights, such notorious human rights abusers as China, Cuba and Saudi Arabia were elected to the Council. Since it began its work less than three months ago, the Human Rights Council has issued three country-specific resolutions, all of them targeting just one country. Such egregious and long-time human rights abusers as Sudan, China, Cuba, Burma, Iran, North Korea, Zimbabwe and Belarus have not even been mentioned on the agenda.

I therefore convened the September 6th hearing to examine what needs to be done to prevent the Council from repeating or further regressing from the failures of the Commission on Human Rights, as well as to support any signs of improvement over its predecessor. The Subcommittee explored how the Council is being assisted by the United States and others to fulfill its mandate, the areas in which further assistance and reform is required, and the standards that the Human Rights Council will need to meet in order to qualify as a credible international human rights body.

In his address in April 2005 to the Commission on Human Rights, the UN Secretary-General argued for a new, reformed human rights council on the basis that it would "allow for a more comprehensive and objective approach. And ultimately it would produce more effective assistance and protections, and that is the yardstick by which we should be measured." It is not too soon to start measuring the Council by this yardstick, and members of the Subcommittee benefited from the testimony of our distinguished witnesses that provided us with the means for such an evaluation.

RECOGNIZING OUTSTANDING
SERVICE TO OUR NATION'S VET-
ERANS

HON. MICHAEL BILIRAKIS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 12, 2006

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, as a veteran myself and an avid advocate for veterans in the United States House of Representatives, I believe it is important to recognize individuals who go above and beyond the call of duty to serve the men and women who bravely wore our nation's military uniform. The James Haley VA Medical Center, VAMC, in Tampa, FL is one of the busiest veterans' medical facilities in the country and provides care to approximately 142,000 veterans in Central Florida.

All employees, excluding service chiefs, who have been employed at the Tampa VAMC for at least 1 year, are eligible to receive the "Hospital Ambassador Award." I am pleased to be able to recognize recent recipients of this award: Geraldine Penia, pharmacy technician; Michele Overland, social worker; Douglas Covey, pharmacist; Jerome Sipes, police officer; Charles Gutierrez, registered respiratory therapist; Ruthe Hunter, supervisor program specialist; Nenita Auza, staff nurse; Betty Thomas, program supply assistant.

I am also pleased to be able to recognize several employees at the Port Richey Outpatient Clinic for their outstanding work. These individuals have received "Employee of the Quarter Awards": Virginia Osmar, program supply clerk; Evelyn Gines-Dasilva, nurse.

I want to extend my sincere appreciation to these outstanding employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs and commend each of them for the tremendous service they provide to our Nation's veterans.

THIS 45TH ANNIVERSARY
CELEBRATION

HON. HENRY J. HYDE

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 12, 2006

Mr. HYDE. Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to congratulate The Hospitality and Information Service, THIS, of Washington, DC, on its 45th anniversary. Since 1961, THIS volunteers have welcomed diplomats and their families to Washington, providing friendship, assistance and an understanding of Washington and the United States.

THIS was organized in 1961 at the suggestion of Angie Biddle, then Chief of Protocol, to help the hundreds of newly arrived diplomats and their families adjust to Washington. THIS is a private, 501(c)(3) non-profit volunteer organization that receives financial support from its volunteers, the Meridian International Center, and corporations. Its sponsors include members of the President's Cabinet or their spouses, and the spouse of the Mayor of the District of Columbia.

In 1961, there were 101 embassies with 1,200 diplomatic families. Today, embassies total more than 170, with 4,000 diplomats and families in Washington. The 400 volunteers of THIS provide a variety of services and programs to help diplomats and their families