

June 6, 2000

THE ADMISSION OF ISRAEL TO THE "WEOG" GROUP AT THE UNITED NATIONS IS A CRITICAL STEP FORWARD

HON. TOM LANTOS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 6, 2000

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, just a few days ago the leaders of Western Europe took an immensely important step by inviting the State of Israel to join the "Western Europe and Other Group" (WEOG) at the United Nations. Membership in a regional grouping is significant at the United Nations because seats on the UN Security Council and other similar rotating positions are made through regional caucuses.

Israel has been a member of the United Nations since 1949—the year after the State of Israel was officially proclaimed—but during that half century, until it was invited to join the WEOG group last week, it was never a member of a regional group. As a result, Israel is the only country in the UN never to hold one of the rotating Security Council seats.

Mr. Speaker, this welcome decision is one that many of our colleagues in the Congress have fought to achieve through letters, resolutions and similar actions. Several months ago, at my suggestion, the ambassadors in Washington of the countries who are members of the WEOG group were invited to a meeting with members of the Committee on International Relations, where we pressed for the inclusion of Israel in that regional grouping. This important meeting made clear to our friends in Western Europe the importance that we in the Congress have given to this issue, and I think it was essential in helping to overcome the ill-founded resistance to Israel's participation in WEOG.

As I said to that large group of ambassadors attending the meeting, geographical proximity is not a consideration since WEOG includes, Turkey, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, in addition to the countries of Western Europe. Israel's strong links with Europe and North America as well as its advanced economy make its interests and policies very consistent with those of the other participants in the WEOG. Israel's exclusion from the Asia Group and the Middle East subgroup is a case of blatant discrimination and a deliberate effort to de-legitimize the State of Israel.

Some of the countries who are members of WEOG were particularly supportive of Israel's participation, and I want to thank in particular the United Kingdom, as well as the northern countries of Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland for their enlightened efforts on this matter.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to pay tribute to many of those who have worked to bring Israel into more complete participation in the United Nations.

The United States representative to the UN, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, has been an important voice for resolving this issue. He appropriately called this decision to admit Israel to WEOG "the rectification of a long-standing and wholly inexcusable exclusion of one coun-

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try—and one country only—from any of the regional groups of the United Nations."

UN Secretary General Kofi Annan also has personally been involved in the effort to resolve this important issue. When Israel was invited to join the WEOG the Secretary General said "this step rectifies a long-standing anomaly" which "should pave the way for Israel to participate on an equal footing with other nations in the main organs of the United Nations, and it upholds the principle, enshrined in the Charter, of equality among all member states."

Mr. Speaker, this temporary membership for Israel in WEOG is not the final step for Israel's full participation in the United Nations, and I am disappointed that the United Nations is still treating Israel differently than other nations. Although Israel will be a member of WEOG, it has been asked to forgo the opportunity to take its turn holding the most influential seats, such as the Security Council, for the foreseeable future. Also, the invitation does not include the right to participate in European caucuses at United Nations regional offices in Geneva, Vienna, and Nairobi. The failure to include Israel in Geneva caucuses is significant because the UN Human Rights Commission is headquartered in Geneva, and this organization has frequently taken a hostile attitude toward Israel.

Mr. Speaker, I welcome the decision of the WEOG to invite Israel to participate, but I emphasize that this is only a first step. Unfortunately, this first step does not fully rectify the half-century of discrimination at the United Nations to which the State of Israel has been subjected. I look forward to Israel's full participation, and I invite my colleagues to join me as we continue our efforts in this regard.

AUTHORIZING EXTENSION OF NON-DISCRIMINATORY TREATMENT (NORMAL TRADE RELATIONS TREATMENT) TO PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

SPEECH OF

HON. TIM ROEMER

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday May 24, 2000

Mr. ROEMER. Mr. Speaker, today we are considering an incredibly important piece of legislation, legislation that will affect the way our Nation and our world move into the next millennium. However, I would like to outline three simple points that should show why supporting Permanent Normal Trade Relations for China is the right thing to do, both for the benefit of the United States and the people of China. Those three points are the economic benefits to American workers and business, the human rights benefits for the people of China, and the necessity to move forward into a more productive and challenging relationship with the government of China.

First, and most important to our communities and constituents, is the way in which PNTR for China will help Americans economically.

Many people become understandably confused over the complexities of trade policy. However, the necessity of PNTR can be easily

explained. China will soon be joining the WTO, and that is not a matter to be decided in Congress. However, as part of the terms of their accession to the WTO, China has been required to negotiate a bilateral trade agreement with the United States. We won those negotiations.

The agreement that was reached requires China to throw open their doors to American business and agriculture. They will reduce tariffs on American-made products from automobiles and aircraft landing systems, to soybeans and pork products. They will dramatically reduce existing quotas on American made products. They will increase the access to their domestic economy by opening up distribution and marketing channels. All of these changes mean that American businesses will be able to sell more of their products to more Chinese people. At the same time, the United States gives up nothing to the Chinese—not one single thing. There is absolutely nothing in this agreement that would encourage an American company to move to China. In fact the agreement actually gives American companies more incentive to stay in the United States. More exports to China means more jobs for Americans at better wages. Passing PNTR will change the status quo, and allow us to export American products, not American jobs.

However, if this body fails to pass this measure today, the United States will not be able to take advantage of that deal. The current status quo will remain, and American companies will find it increasingly difficult to sell their wares to a booming Chinese market. In fact, due to the fact that the European Union, and other countries in Asia and around the world have similar agreements with China, American companies will actually be worse off than they are now! The other WTO members will be able to market their products to China more efficiently than we can, effectively shutting the United States out of the China market.

The choice is simple: Economic stagnation and regression, or commercial growth and prosperity. We need to respond to the new global economy, driven by a technological revolution, with a new fair trade policy.

The choice is just as clear on the issue of human rights.

It may be easy for people in Washington, D.C. to speculate what policies might be best for the Chinese people. However, when it comes to improving the human rights and political freedoms of people in China, I tend to place more weight on what the people in China, fighting those fights every day, think is best for themselves.

The following human rights advocates strongly endorse this new policy:

Martin Lee—chairman of the Democratic Party of Hong Kong which struggles daily to maintain the freedoms that are unique to that region;

Xie Wanjun—chief director of the China Democracy Party, most of whose members are now in detention in China;

Nie Minzhi—a member of the China Democracy party who is under house arrest as we stand in this Chamber today;

Zhou Yang—a veteran of the 1979 Democracy Wall movement;

Bao Tong—a persecuted dissident and human rights activist;

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Dai Quing—an environmentalist and writer who served time in prison after Tiananmen Square;

Zhou Litai—a pioneering Chinese labor lawyer who represents injured workers in legal battles against Chinese companies;

Even the Dalai Lama himself, probably the most famous Chinese dissident in the world, supports WTO accession.

All of these people have been fighting for democracy and freedom in China on the ground, day-to-day. They all say the same thing: Support PNTR for China. They say this because they have seen how the annual renewal of NTR for China has become a bargaining chip for an oppressive government. They have seen firsthand how engagement with the United States has made China a more open society. They don't want to become isolated from the world. They want to join us in freedom and democracy.

Working to ensure human rights in China is the right thing to do. However voting against PNTR is not the way to do it. We need to listen to the brave people fighting the good fight on the ground in China, and we need to pass PNTR. Very prominent Americans, such as Gen. Colin Powell, Rev. Billy Graham, and President Jimmy Carter agree with this approach.

Finally, I want to stress the need for a change in our relationship with China. While we have come to see some improvement in China since the late 1970's, the Chinese government has still remained insular, resistant to change, and unwilling to allow sweeping reforms. The relationship between our two countries has warmed, but it has not completely thawed.

Voting against PNTR is telling China and the rest of the world that you like things the way they are today; that you prefer the status quo. As an elected representative to Congress however, I cannot in good conscience say that keeping the status quo with China is best way for our country to proceed in this new millennium.

Isolation and recriminations in the face of repression get us nowhere. One only has to look next door to China to North Korea. We cut that country off from the world fifty years ago, and look what happened to them. North Korea is easily one of the most unstable, irrational, and hostile nations on this planet. Human rights and political freedoms are nonexistent, and on top of it all, their people are slowly starving to death in a massive famine. Is that what we want China to become? Do we want to shut China off from the world? Will we refuse to challenge and engage the Chinese government?

I say that pursuing a policy of thoughtless isolationism is not only economical suicide for the American worker, it is also callously dismissive of those brave souls in China who are trying to create change and fight for human rights.

We must vote for PNTR today. We must actively work to make our world a better place for our children. We must reach out to the Chinese and attempt to lead them down the right path to embrace our values of democracy, open markets, and human rights. We must help them become a modern nation. The United States will probably be the main bene-

ficiary of this evolution in China, but it will help the Chinese people some day join our fellowship of democratic nations with a respect for universal human rights.

CONDEMNING THE ACTIONS OF
IRAN REGARDING 13 JEWISH
CITIZENS

HON. MICHAEL P. FORBES

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 6, 2000

Mr. FORBES. Mr. Speaker, I rise to express my outrage about the ongoing activities in the City of Shiraz, Iran. Thirteen Jewish citizens of Iran were arrested on Passover eve in 1999 for allegedly spying for Israel and the United States, despite adamant denials from both countries regarding these trumped-up allegations. These individuals, including rabbis, religious teachers, and community activists, have committed no crime other than openly practicing the Jewish religion. In Iran, members of the Jewish faith are prohibited from holding any positions that would grant them access to state secrets or sensitive materials; thus, there is no possibility that Israel or the United States would employ 13 Jewish individuals to be spies—particularly those living hundreds of miles from the capital city of Tehran. According to the Los Angeles-based Council of Iranian American Jewish Organizations, Iranian officials have even admitted that the charges of espionage were false. "They have never claimed there 13 people were spies. . . . They were very forthright and up front about the fact that this is part of a game, and to show that Iran will not be bullied and that they have ultimate control over their citizens."

The Iranian government's false accusations of spying and arrests of innocent individuals on these sham charges are wholly unacceptable. If these ludicrous charges are allowed to stand, these innocent individuals may be found guilty and executed. The government of Iran must know that the world community is watching and will not stand by idly and accept this treatment of our contemporaries!

Since the arrests over one year ago, the Iranian government has treated these Jewish citizens in a deplorable manner and denied them any due process. Primarily, the government detained these innocent individuals for over one year without being charged. During that time, they were barely allowed any visitors. Moreover, no attorney was allowed to visit or meet with the 13 Jewish citizens. Finally, the three youngest citizens were released on bail, but the other ten Jewish citizens are still being wrongly detained. Inherently unfair, the "judge" is also the investigator, chief interrogator behind bars, prosecutor, and jury in this sham trial. These trials are devoid of public attendance; there is virtually no information or evidence provided, only hollow conclusionary and coerced confessions without any details.

Recent actions have brought further concerns. Just before the "trial" began in early May, a leading Iranian cleric delivered a sermon over state radio declaring, "These people are spies . . . they are Jews and are . . . by nature enemies of Muslims." Most dis-

concerting, since the beginning of May, these Jewish citizens are beginning to "confess" to crimes that they did not commit. Now the Iranian government is showing these alleged confessions on television. This vicious propaganda is impacting Jews negatively throughout Iran. Jews throughout the country—even Jewish children—are experiencing harassment on the street, at work, and in school. There are reports of anti-Jewish graffiti and fears of an economic boycott of Jewish-owned shops. This anti-Semitism and persecution of Jews must stop, and it must stop immediately.

The oldest Jewish Diaspora community and the biggest in the Middle East after Israel, Jews lived in peace in Iran for more than 2700 years. In 1979, there were 80,000 Jews living comfortably in Iran. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, however, the Iranian government has consistently articulated anti-Israel and anti-Semitic propaganda. In the last twenty years, seventeen Jews have been executed on charges of spying, and Jewish property has been confiscated. Many of these executions occurred without any trials of the accused. Now, there are only 25,000–30,000 Jewish citizens, and the entire Jewish community is threatened by further state sponsored religious persecution.

In May, we in Congress took steps to emphasize how seriously this sham trial will affect Iran's status in the world community. We wrote to the World Bank and contacted nations on the bank's loan approval board to urge postponement of pending loans for development projects for Iran. Unfortunately, loans to Iran were approved for hundreds of millions of dollars. Our government—President Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, rightfully indicated that the World Bank should not have made these loans to Iran at the very time that its government was conducting these sham trials. Nonetheless, Members of Congress or other world leaders will not overlook the outcome of this "trial."

In addition, I am a proud co-sponsor of H. Con. Res. 307, a critical resolution introduced by my New York colleague, Mr. BENJAMIN GILMAN. This important measure expresses the sense of Congress that the Clinton Administration should condemn the arrest and prosecution of these 13 Jewish individuals, demand that the fabricated charges be dropped and the individuals released immediately, and ensure that Iran's treatment of this case is a benchmark for determining the nature of current and future relations between the United States and Iran. We must work quickly and diligently to pass this important resolution.

I stand here to urge the government of Iran to release all 13 wrongly imprisoned citizens and drop all charges against these innocent individuals immediately. I also urge our government to continue to apply pressure to the government of Iran until this anti-Semitic behavior is terminated. We must be vigilant and work tirelessly until the government of Iran has restored freedom and respect to all its people.