

The UN doesn't like this free, liberal world

By Jennifer O'riel, The Australian, 31 July 2017

The United Nations has become a threat to the liberal international order. It weakens the constitution of liberal democratic states by attacking the political and cultural conditions required for their survival. It attacks the security of free-world countries and the common values that underpin free societies. In recent years, UN leadership has become more hostile to free citizens and politicians who dissent from illiberal supranational rule.

The UN often acts against the free world by targeting politicians who defend the liberty, security and safety of free citizens. In particular, UN chiefs target pro-Western politicians who defend the free world by upholding democratic rule over supranational rule and adopt secure border policy to keep free societies free. During the US presidential campaign, UN human rights chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein said he didn't intend to interfere with political campaigns but declared Donald Trump "dangerous from an international point of view".

UN members attack the free world by smearing pro-Western politicians with propaganda terms such as xenophobia, Islamophobia, racism and populism. Its leadership has framed democratic citizens' defence of free-world countries as "xenophobia". They call democratically elected politicians who represent their people and protect them from harm "populist". They claim secure border policy is a form of nationalism and by extension (in UN thought), an abuse of human rights. And they depict the UN as a bastion of benevolent internationalism, despite its track record.

In the past week, we witnessed the UN act as a seemingly illiberal and dishonest organisation. The High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi, accused the Australian government of misleading the UN. He claimed the UNHCR agreed to help facilitate the Australia-US refugee transfer "on the clear understanding that vulnerable refugees with close family ties in Australia would ultimately be allowed to settle there". To Australian ears, the supposed deal sounded improbable. It would undermine the hard-won border policy developed by the Abbott government. Operation Sovereign Borders broke the business model of people smugglers by refusing to reward them with entry to Australia.

The gravity of the UN refugee commissioner's claims against the Australian government prompted media to request supporting evidence. On the ABC, Leigh Sales asked the UNHCR's assistant commissioner for protection, Volker Turk, who had given the "clear understanding" to the commission. After several attempts to clarify what agreement had been made, it appeared that the UN was misleading Australia, not the reverse. We are still waiting for the UNHCR to provide valid evidence or apologise for misleading the international community about Australia's secure border policy. But apparently, being the UN means never having to say you're sorry.

Since the election of Australia's conservative government, the UN has attacked our secure border policy, counter-terrorism measures and attempts to reduce unprecedented national debt by curbing expenditure on discretionary foreign aid programs. In 2015, UN migrant rights rapporteur Francois Crepeau claimed falsely that he was denied proper access to offshore immigration processing centres. At the time, I questioned Crepeau's objectivity given that he was a council member of the Global Detention Project, an activist group highly critical of such centres.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres also has a history of left activism. He was president of the Socialist International at its 22nd congress, which resolved that “the goal of the SI must be to parliamentarise the global political system” by the establishment of a “UN Parliamentary Assembly”. Later, as UNHCR chief, Guterres criticised “manifestations of xenophobia ... Islamophobia, racism” and “xenophobic parties” in Europe. While he praised Australia’s generosity in hosting and integrating refugees, Guterres made the rather extraordinary claim that our issue with boat arrivals was “a kind of collective sociological and psychological question”. No, it was a kind of 1200-deaths-at-sea atrocity.

The reason Australia’s conservative government introduced Operation Sovereign Borders was to break the people smugglers’ business model. The smuggling industry thrived under Labor’s porous border policy, which resulted in 50,000 unlawful arrivals and 1200 deaths at sea. Some porous border activists use asylum-seekers dying at sea to push for even more open borders. For conservatives, however, lives and procedural fairness matter more. As Malcolm Turnbull acknowledged in London, managing the 50,000 unlawful arrivals under Labor cost Australians more than \$10 billion. And it meant more than 14,500 refugees waiting in UN camps were denied a place under Australia’s offshore humanitarian program.

The UN rails against conservative party politicians who defend secure border policy so that Western democracy and open society can flourish. Human rights chief Hussein described right-wing Western politicians as “demagogues” and compared their “tactics” with those of genocidal Islamic State.

However, the UN adopts a comparatively accommodationist approach to closed and illiberal societies under Islamist and communist rule. Last year, the UN General Assembly honoured communist dictator Fidel Castro with a minute of silence. On that day, as on so many others, it entertained attacks on Israel’s sovereignty by Islamists. And the UN is yet to explain how its benevolent internationalism includes the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation’s redefinition of human rights to disallow freedoms “contrary to the principles of the sharia”.

As high commissioner for refugees, Guterres said Islamic law and tradition “provide(d) an invaluable foundation for the legal framework” used by his office.

The UN’s capitulation to an increasingly illiberal international order manifests in a frontal assault on the core values that form the foundations of the free world. The liberal democratic state is sustained by a society of citizens who are taught to uphold and defend such values. They include the separation of powers between religious authority and state authority embodied in the secular state; public reason tempered by the mastery of free thought, speech and objective scholarly inquiry; formal equality; the protection of free citizens from harm by means of secure borders; and the defence of free societies from the tyranny of illiberalism.

It is popular to blame Trump or conservatives for declining confidence in the liberal international order and multilateral institutions. But the decline predates Trump’s presidency by years. Liberal internationalists need to acknowledge there’s something rotten in the state of the UN.