

25 June 2018

**Board Members**

Geeta Desai  
President

Hazel Bowen  
Vice-President

Rae Duff  
Vice-President

Eileen Focke-Bakker  
Vice-President

Louise McLeod  
Vice-President

Başak Ovacik  
Vice-President

Katharina Strub  
Treasurer

Secretary of State Michael Pompeo  
US Office of Chief Protocol  
2201 C Street NW, Room 1238  
Washington, DC 20520

Dear Mr Pompeo

**US withdrawal from the UN Human Rights Council**

GWI is an international NGO with a main focus on women's and children's rights and the importance of education, understanding and friendship to enhance global peace and sustainable communities. It was established in 1919 in response to the impact of World War 1. GWI, formerly International Federation of University Women, is in special consultative status with ECOSOC since 1947 and is an NGO maintaining official relations with UNESCO.

It is with regret and serious misgivings that we note that your government has withdrawn from participating in the UN Human Rights Council, with Ambassador Nikki Haley, calling it "an organization that is not worthy of its name." as reported on June 18 in the *Washington Post*. This is a very damaging statement.

You, yourself, are reported as conceding that the council once had a "noble vision." We contend that it still does.

In an imperfect world, leaders were and continue to be very aware of the need for a mechanism/mechanisms to balance out and manage as best they could the tensions which inevitably arise amongst peoples, governments and geographic areas. The United Nations and its various agencies grew out of this desire to maintain some balance.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a most inspiring document – and a wonderful testament to the values espoused by Eleanor Roosevelt and supported by the US government. The Declaration has influenced a number of constitutions and laws aimed at protecting and promoting human rights.

With new world players having emerged, it is obvious that the Human Rights Council would have undergone changes. This does not negate its important role in helping balance out the ever present global tensions and providing a mechanism to deal with abuses of human rights.

It would be most unfortunate if the United States is seen to be only interested in its own agenda against all others. There is no reason why the US representatives should not continue to influence change that the US would prefer, but it must be conceded, surely, that the whole idea was to have agencies which endeavour to balance out the needs and wants of all nations.

It is dangerous to the precarious balance of powers for the US to simply want to go it alone. It has been reported that although numerous officials have said repeatedly that "America First does not mean America Alone," the current

administration has retreated from multiple multilateral accords and consensus since it took office. As has been confirmed in countless fora, human rights are interdependent and indivisible and must be viewed as universal.

Ambassador Haley is reported as saying that the Council membership “includes accused human rights abusers such as China, Cuba, Venezuela and the Democratic Republic of Congo”. As she would also know, these countries are engaged with in many other spheres, including economically. They form part of our global world and must be engaged with on all accounts and certainly in an endeavour to enhance human rights.

There are numerous structures within the Council to draw attention to abuses and to work towards stronger Human Rights, such as Universal Periodic Review Working Group, Advisory Committee, and Complaint Procedures.

You have stated that the Trump administration is committed to protecting and promoting dignity and freedom of every human being. Every individual has rights that are inherent and inviolable. You also acknowledge that there have been improvements in certain human rights situations through the Council. Ambassador Haley also noted that the US was not trying to impose the US way on all members of the Council. If the US is concerned at the many commitments which have gone unfulfilled there are more positive ways to address this issue rather than withdrawing from the Council.

GWI hopes that your Government will reconsider your withdrawal from the Council. This would acknowledge the importance of universal human rights and therefore the work of the Human Rights Council while allowing the US to continue to play its part in balancing out the pressures and tensions which will inevitably continue.

Yours faithfully

Hazel Bowen  
Vice President : Advocacy and Education  
Graduate Women International (GWI)



+27 21 8561348 / +27 828510835

Skype: hazel\_bowen

GWI headquarters:

Chemin du Grand-Montfleury, 48

CH-1290 Versoix Geneva, Switzerland

Tel: +41 22 731 23 80

Website: [www.graduatewomen.org](http://www.graduatewomen.org)



SDG 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all