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UN General Assembly Suspends Russia From Human Rights Council

By AFP

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Russia Ukraine War Human Rights Council **AP**

The UN General Assembly voted Thursday to suspend Russia from the UN Human Rights Council as punishment for the invasion of Ukraine.

Of the 193 members of the assembly, 93 voted in favor of suspension as proposed by the United States while 24 voted against and 58 abstained, suggesting weakening international unity against Russia at the United Nations.

It was the second-ever suspension of a country from the council. Libya was the first, in 2011.

Suspension required two-thirds of the votes for and against; the abstentions did not count.

The countries voting against included China, a Moscow ally which has steadfastly abstained from criticizing the invasion. Others were Iran, the former Soviet republic of Kazakhstan and

communist Cuba, as well as Russia itself, Belarus and Syria.

Despite pressure from Moscow for a no vote, several African countries only abstained, such as South Africa and Senegal. Also abstaining were Brazil, Mexico and India.

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The US argues that this punishment — suspending Russia from the Geneva-based organization that is the UN's main human rights monitor — is more than symbolic and in fact intensifies Russia's isolation after the assault on Ukraine that began on February 24.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has also called for Russia to be expelled from the UN Security Council "so it cannot block decisions about its own aggression, its own war."

But Washington has admitted there is little anyone can do about Russia's position on the Security Council, where it has a veto.

Match words with 'action'

More than 11 million people have been displaced since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24.

The world has been outraged by images of scores of civilians apparently executed and left in mass graves in areas formerly controlled by Russian troops. This carnage has led to new rounds of sanctions against Russia.

Journalists including from AFP last weekend found corpses in civilian clothes, some with their hands bound in the town of Bucha outside Kyiv.

"The images out of Bucha and devastation across Ukraine require us to now match our words with action," US ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said Monday as she pressed for Russia's suspension from the rights council.

"We cannot let a member state that is subverting every principle we hold dear to continue to participate" in the council, she said.

The Kremlin has denied Russian forces killed civilians, and alleged that the images of dead bodies in Bucha were "fakes."

The UN Human Rights Council was founded in 2006 and is composed of 47 member states chosen by the General Assembly.

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