

Donald Trump would be 'dangerous' if elected, warns UN human rights chief

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Geneva: Doubling down on his recent expression of concerns about "populist demagogues", the United Nations human rights chief on Wednesday said that US Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump would be "dangerous from an international point of view" if he is elected.

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In a broad-ranging news conference touching on issues like violence in Yemen, Syria and sub-Saharan Africa, UNHRC chief Zeid Ra'ad al-Hussein said some remarks by Trump are "deeply unsettling and disturbing to me," particularly on torture and about "vulnerable communities."

"If Donald Trump is elected, on the basis of what he has said already and unless that changes, I think it's without any doubt that he would be dangerous from an international point of view," Zeid told reporters in Geneva.

The comments from Zeid, a Jordanian prince, are likely to fan a debate in UN circles about whether he has been overstepping his mandate as the High Commissioner for Human Rights with comments on the US presidential nominee and nationalist, xenophobic leaders in parts of Europe.

Only a day earlier, Russia's ambassador to the United Nations in New York, Vitaly Churkin, said Zeid shouldn't criticize foreign heads of state and government "for their policies. This is not his business. He should be more focused on his specific responsibilities."

Zeid alluded to a report Friday by The Associated Press indicating that Churkin had last month formally complained directly to the UN secretary-general about Zeid's comments, saying: "I was not there, of course, and there was no demarche (formal report) made to me."

The rights chief also advanced the debate publicly. While he acknowledged UN rules that instruct the world body to avoid intervening in issues that are the "domestic jurisdiction of states," Zeid alluded to similar complaints about interference once made by apartheid South Africa that the UN General Assembly dismissed "time and again."

As for the run-up to the November 8 US presidential election, Zeid said: "Clearly I am not keen or intent on interfering in any political campaign within any particular country." Still, he added that he felt he should speak out in the wake of Trump's calls that suggested he favored a "potential" for an increase in "the use of torture."

- (With AP inputs)