

# HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL



UNITED NATIONS  
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

# WHAT IS THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL?

The UN Human Rights Council (Council or HRC) is the principle intergovernmental body within the United Nations (UN) system responsible for strengthening the promotion and protection of human rights around the globe, and for addressing and taking action on human rights violations around the globe.

The Council holds meetings throughout the year providing a multilateral forum to address human rights violations wherever and whenever they occur. It responds to human rights emergencies and makes recommendations on how to better implement human rights on the ground. The Council has the ability to discuss all thematic human rights issues and country-specific situations that require its attention.

The Council held its first session in June 2006. One year later, the Council adopted its "Institution-Building" package by resolution 5/1 to guide its work and set up its procedures and mechanisms. Among the Council's subsidiary bodies are the Universal Periodic Review mechanism (UPR), the Special Procedures, the Advisory Committee and the Complaint Procedure.

The Council can also establish international commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions investigating and responding to human rights violations, to help expose violators and bring them to justice.

DEC 2004	"High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change" recommends strengthening the UN Commission on Human Rights
MARCH 2005	UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan recommends to replace the Commission with a "Human Rights Council"
15 MARCH 2006	The Council replaces the Commission on Human Rights by UN General Assembly res. 60/251
18 - 30 JUNE 2006	The Council holds its 1st session in Geneva
18 JUNE 2007	The Council adopts the "Institution-Building" package by res. 5/1, establishing its subsidiary bodies
7 - 18 APRIL 2008	The UPR Working Group holds its 1st session reviewing the first group of States
MARCH 2011	Five-year review of the Council endorsed with adoption of res. 16/21 (by consensus)
MAY 2012	Start of 2nd UPR cycle
13 JUNE 2016	High-level panel discussion on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Council: achievements and challenges
MAY 2017	Start of 3rd UPR cycle

## HOW DOES THE COUNCIL WORK?

The Human Rights Council meets for at least 10 weeks per year at the United Nations Office in Geneva, Switzerland, in regular sessions usually taking place in March, June and September. The Council can also convene urgent meetings on short notice to respond to emerging human rights crises – 28 such special sessions were held thus far. The Council's subsidiary bodies meet for approximately 20 additional weeks each year. Since its 1st session in 2006, the Council's agenda has been expanding and its meeting time has more than doubled.

The Council is made up of 47 member States who are elected by the UN General Assembly by a simple majority vote, through a secret ballot. Members of the Council are elected for three-year terms with one-third of the members being renewed each year. Council membership is based on equitable geographical distribution of seats according to the following regional breakdown: 13 African States; 13 Asia-Pacific States; 8 Latin American and Caribbean States; 7 Western European and other States; 6 Eastern European States. 117 countries have served as Council members so far, reflecting the UN's diversity giving it legitimacy when speaking out on human rights violations in all countries.

The Council has a Bureau which consists of a president and four vice-presidents who represent each of the five regional groups, and who serve for a year in accordance with the Council's annual cycle (January – December). Staff from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) serve as the secretariat for the Council providing its members with technical, substantive and administrative support. In addition to the member States of the Council, observers, which include non-member States, inter-governmental organizations, national human rights institutions, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), also participate actively in Council sessions.

The Council can adopt texts with or without a recorded vote. To adopt a draft text by a vote, it must enjoy the support of a majority of the members of the Council. Only Council members are able to vote. The decisions of the Council are not legally binding. To date the Council adopted over 1,750 texts to address a wide range of thematic and country-specific human rights issues.

### PRESIDENTS OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

JUNE 2006 - JUNE 2007	LUIS A. DE ALBA GÓNGORA (Mexico)
JUNE 2007 - JUNE 2008	DORU COSTEA (Romania)
JUNE 2008 - JUNE 2009	MARTIN I. UHOMOIBHI (Nigeria)
JUNE 2009 - JUNE 2010	ALEX VAN MEEUWEN (Belgium)
JUNE 2010 - JUNE 2011	SIHASAK PHUANGKETKEOW (Thailand)
JUNE 2011 - DEC 2012	LAURA DUPUY LASSERRE (Uruguay)
2013	REMIGIUSZ ACHILLES HENCZEL (Poland)
2014	BAUDELAIRE NDONG ELLA (Gabon)
2015	JOACHIM RÜCKER (Germany)
2016	CHOI KYONGLIM (Republic of Korea)
2017	JOAQUÍN A. MAZA MARTELLI (El Salvador)
2018	VOJISLAV ŠUC (Slovenia)
2019	COLY SECK (Senegal)
2020	ELISABETH TICHY-FISSLBERGER (Austria)

# HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MEMBERSHIP ACROSS THE GLOBE (2006-2020)\*



■ Former and current Council members

■ Other

The boundaries shown, the designations used and the presentation of material on this map do not imply any opinion, official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.



## LDCs / SIDS TRUST FUND

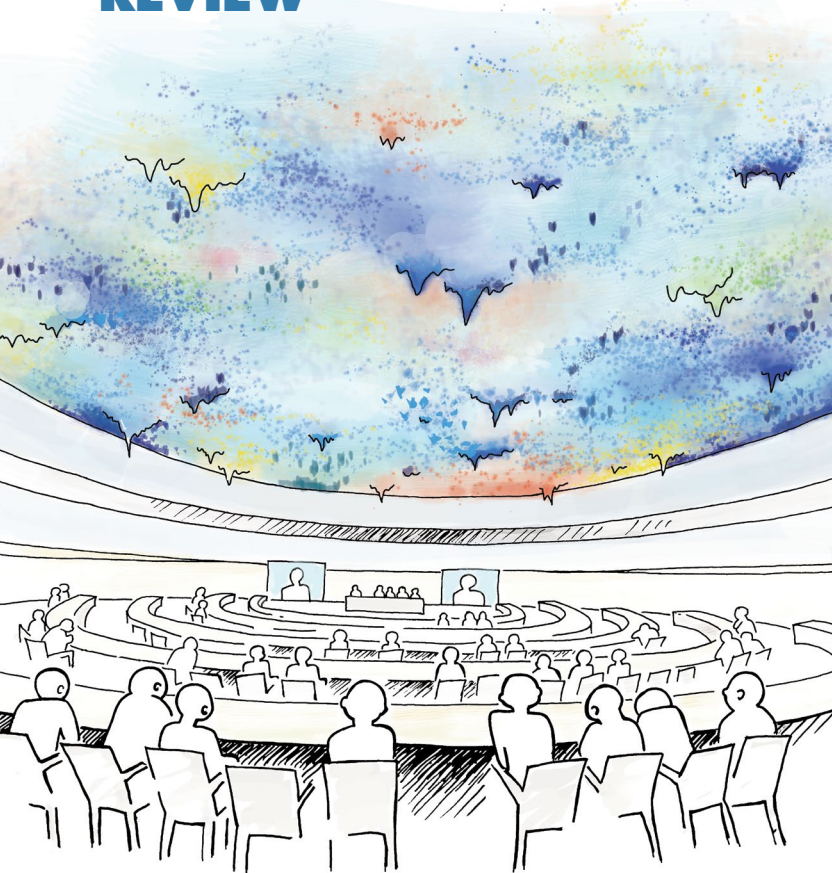
In 2012 the Human Rights Council established the Voluntary Technical Assistance Trust Fund to support the participation of Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) in the work of the Council. The LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund, operational since 2014, runs on voluntary contributions from UN member States.

The LDCs/SIDS Trust Fund aims to ensure that LDCs and SIDS without permanent representation in Geneva are able to participate and contribute to the work of the Council. It does so by providing training on human rights and engagement with the Council, fellowship programmes and practical induction trainings for delegates. More recently, it also provides annual briefings to delegates in New York on the engagement with the General Assembly and conducts regional workshops.

Currently, 72 LDCs/SIDS are eligible to apply for the Trust Fund (14 Latin American and Caribbean States, 22 Asia-Pacific States, and 36 African State). Around 10 delegates are supported per Council session and up to eight delegates per year for the fellowship programme. Participation of LDCs and SIDS delegates in Council sessions enables them to better advance and promote human rights issues that are of primary importance for their respective countries, such as climate change.



# UNIVERSAL PERIODIC REVIEW



The Human Rights Council's Universal Periodic Review (UPR) is a unique process which involves a review of the human rights records of all 193 UN member States once every 4.5 years. The UPR is one of the most innovative and powerful achievements of the Council designed to ensure equal treatment for every country when their human rights situations are assessed. It provides the opportunity for each State to declare what actions they have taken to improve the human rights situation in their countries and to fulfil their human rights obligations, as well as the challenges and constraints they are facing in so doing.

During UPR Working Group meetings held three times per year, UN member States spell out positive achievements, express concerns and ultimately pose recommendations to the States under review. Each year 42 States are reviewed, receiving an average of 180 recommendations each. Reviewed States are then expected to indicate which recommendations they support, and to report on measures and steps taken to implement them, which on average are 75% of all the recommendations made. Moreover, the UPR also provides a space for States to request technical assistance from other States to enhance their capacity to deal effectively with challenges and for them to share best practices.

The ultimate aim of this process is to improve concretely the human rights situation in all countries with significant consequences for people around the globe and address human rights violations wherever they occur.

Since the UPR began functioning in 2008, there has been 100% participation by all 193 UN member States. The 3rd cycle of reviewing the human rights records of each country commenced in 2017.

## SPECIAL PROCEDURES

The Human Rights Council's Special Procedures mandate holders are made up of special rapporteurs, independent experts or working groups composed of five members who are appointed by the Council and who serve in their personal capacity.

Special Procedures undertake country visits; act on individual cases and concerns of a broader, structural nature by sending communications to States and other actors bringing alleged violations or abuses to their attention; conduct thematic studies and convene expert consultations; contribute to the development of international human rights standards; engage in advocacy; raise public awareness; and provide advice for technical cooperation.

These independent experts report at least once a year to the Council on their findings and recommendations, as well as to the UN General Assembly. At times they are the only mechanism alerting the international community to certain human rights issues.

Currently there are 80 active Special Procedures mandate holders for 56 mandates - 44 thematic mandates, such as water and sanitation, arbitrary detention, the rights of migrants, violence against women, torture and human trafficking, and 12 country-specific mandates.





## ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Human Rights Council's Advisory Committee functions as the "think-tank" of the Council focusing mainly on studies and research-based advice. It consists of 18 independent experts that are elected by the Council and are drawn proportionally from the five UN regional groups. The experts are from different professional backgrounds, all serve in their personal capacity for three-year terms and are eligible for re-election only once.

The Advisory Committee held its first meeting in 2008. It meets twice a year, in February and August, for one week each.

The Advisory Committee is implementation-oriented, has produced studies on a wide range of thematic issues including culture funds, corruption, local government, post-disaster and post-conflict situations, terrorist hostage-taking, the right to food, missing persons, the rights of persons living with albinism, and promoting human rights through sport and the Olympic ideal, among others. The Advisory Committee has also formulated draft declarations as well as principles and guidelines on a number of topics, some of which were endorsed by the General Assembly. These include the principles and guidelines for the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by leprosy and their family members.



## COMPLAINT PROCEDURE

The Human Rights Council's Complaint Procedure is a victims'-oriented process addressing consistent patterns of gross and reliably attested human rights violations occurring in any part of the world and under any circumstances. The Complaint Procedure is based on communications received from individuals, groups or non-governmental organizations that claim to be victims of human rights violations or that have direct, reliable knowledge of such violations.

The Complaint Procedure was established in 2007 out of the need to improve the previous 1503 procedure through increasing impartiality, objectivity, efficiency and victim-orientation.

Two distinct working groups - the Working Group on Communications and the Working Group on Situations - are responsible, respectively, for examining communications and bringing violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms to the Council's attention, for their further action. The Complaint Procedure conducts its work in a confidential manner (unless it decides otherwise), with a view to enhance cooperation with the State concerned.

This is the only universal complaint procedure covering all human rights and fundamental freedoms in all UN member States. An average of 4,000 communications are submitted to the Complaint Procedure each year.



## COMMISSIONS OF INQUIRIES AND FACT-FINDING MISSIONS

The Human Rights Council can also establish international commissions of inquiries, fact-finding missions and investigations to respond to serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, whether protracted or resulting from sudden events, and to promote accountability for such violations and counter impunity.

The commissions of inquiries and fact-finding missions produce hard-hitting evidence on war crimes and crimes against humanity, feeding into formal justice processes to hold violators accountable.

These investigative bodies are supported by OHCHR staff who provide administrative, logistical as well as security support and expertise, and carry out missions as mandated. To date 31 such commissions and missions have been created by the Council with 7 currently active.

SEPT 2019 - TODAY	Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
SEPT 2018 - TODAY	Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar
JULY 2018 - TODAY	International team of experts on the Kasai region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
SEPT 2017 - TODAY	Group of Eminent Experts on the situation of human rights in Yemen
SEPT 2016 - TODAY	Commission of Inquiry on human rights in Burundi
MARCH 2016 - TODAY	Commission on human rights in South Sudan
AUG 2011 - TODAY	Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic

## **EXPERT MECHANISM ON THE RIGHTS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES**

The Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides the Human Rights Council with thematic advice in the form of studies and research on the rights of Indigenous peoples as directed by the Council. Its studies have covered issues such as education, the right to participation in decision making processes, access to justice, the role of language, cultures and the identity of indigenous peoples, among others.

The Expert Mechanism may suggest proposals to the Council for its consideration and approval, and can highlight good practices. Moreover, the Expert Mechanism may also provide member States technical advice regarding the development of domestic policies relating to the rights of indigenous peoples, as well as the implementation of recommendations.

The Expert Mechanism is made up of seven independent experts based on equitable geographical distribution and gender balance, who are appointed by the Council for 3 year terms. It holds one annual session, usually in July, with the participation of a wide range of stakeholders, whose participation is also strengthened through the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations. The Expert Mechanism reports to the Council once a year and produces an annual study on the status on the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide.

## **EXPERT MECHANISM ON THE RIGHT TO DEVELOPMENT**

The Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development was established by the Human Rights Council in September 2019 with a mandate to provide the Council with thematic expertise on the right to development in order to implement this right worldwide. The Expert Mechanism will consist of five independent experts, who will be appointed by the Council President at the conclusion of its 43rd session in March 2020. The new body will meet once annually for three days in Geneva and once annually for three days in New York, and will report once a year to the Council on its activities. The meetings will be open to States, UN bodies, intergovernmental organizations, regional organizations, national human rights institutions, academics and experts on development issues, and NGOs.



## CONSULTATIVE GROUP

The Human Rights Council's Consultative Group is a body comprised of five ambassadors, representing each of the five regional groups and serving in a personal capacity, charged with making recommendations for candidates to fill positions of UN human rights experts - Special Procedures mandate holders, members of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Expert Mechanism on the Right to Development.

The Consultative Group carries out its work through a competitive and transparent process through which it evaluates candidates' expertise and experience in the field of the vacant mandate. The Consultative Group then makes recommendations to the President of the Council noting their preferred candidates, which are made public in a report prior to each regular session of the Council. The appointment is finalized when the selected candidate nominated by the President is approved by the Council during its session.



## FORUM ON MINORITY ISSUES

The Forum on Minority Issues has been established to provide a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to national or ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, as well as to provide thematic contributions and expertise to the work of the Special Rapporteur on Minority Issues. The Forum identifies and analyses best practices, challenges, opportunities and initiatives for the further implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities.

The Forum meets annually for two working days allocated to thematic discussions with a Chairperson appointed by the President of the Human Rights Council on the basis of regional rotation, and in consultation with regional groups. The Special Rapporteur on minority issues guides the work of the Forum, prepares its annual meetings and reports on the thematic recommendations of the Forum to the Council.

The Forum is open to all relevant stakeholder groups, including States, the wider UN system, intergovernmental and regional organizations, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and affected stakeholders, among others.



## FORUM ON BUSINESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The Forum on Business and Human Rights is a multi-stakeholder body charged with discussing trends and challenges in the implementation of the Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. It promotes dialogue and cooperation on issues linked to business and human rights, including challenges faced in particular sectors, operational environments or in relation to specific rights or groups. It also identifies good practices.

As per Council resolution 17/4, the Forum is open to all relevant stakeholder groups, including States, the wider UN system, intergovernmental and regional organizations, businesses, labour unions, national human rights institutions, non-governmental organizations and affected stakeholders, among others.

## SOCIAL FORUM

The Social Forum is an annual three-day meeting convened by the Human Rights Council. It is defined as a unique space for open and interactive dialogue between civil society actors, representatives of member States, and intergovernmental organizations, on a theme chosen by the Council each year.

The Social Forum has addressed issues such as the impacts of economic and financial crises on efforts to combat poverty, the adverse effects of climate change on human rights, the promotion of the right to development, the rights of older persons, access to medicines and the rights of persons with disabilities, among others.

The reports produced by the Social Forum are submitted to the Council for further consideration.

## FORUM ON HUMAN RIGHTS, DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW

The Forum on Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law established by the Human Rights Council provides a platform for promoting dialogue and cooperation on issues pertaining to the relationship between these areas and to identify and analyse best practices, challenges and opportunities for States in their efforts to secure respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The Forum meets biannually for 2 working days. The President of the Council appoints for each session, on the basis of regional rotation and in consultation with regional groups, a Chairperson of the Forum from candidates nominated by members and observers of the Council.

## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL MEMBERS (2020)

### ASIA-PACIFIC STATES

AFGHANISTAN  
 BAHRAIN  
 BANGLADESH  
 FIJI  
 INDIA  
 INDONESIA  
 JAPAN  
 MARSHALL ISLANDS  
 NEPAL  
 PAKISTAN  
 PHILIPPINES  
 REPUBLIC OF KOREA  
 QATAR

### AFRICAN STATES

ANGOLA  
 BURKINA FASO  
 CAMEROON  
 DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO  
 ERITREA  
 LIBYIA  
 MAURITANIA  
 NAMIBIA  
 NIGERIA  
 SENEGAL  
 SOMALIA  
 SUDAN  
 TOGO

### LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN STATES

ARGENTINA  
 BAHAMAS  
 BRAZIL  
 CHILE  
 MEXICO  
 PERU  
 URUGUAY  
 VENEZUELA (BOLIVARIAN REPUBLIC OF)

### WESTERN EUROPE AND OTHERS STATES

AUSTRALIA  
 AUSTRIA  
 DENMARK  
 GERMANY  
 ITALY  
 NETHERLANDS  
 SPAIN

### EASTERN EUROPEAN STATES

ARMENIA  
 BULGARIA  
 CZECHIA  
 POLAND  
 SLOVAKIA  
 UKRAINE

### HRC BUREAU (2020)

#### PRESIDENT

AMB. MS. ELISABETH TICHY-FISSELBERGER (AUSTRIA)

#### VICE-PRESIDENTS

AMB. MR. YACKOLEY KOKOU JOHNSON (TOGO) - **RAPPORTEUR**  
 AMB. MR. NASIR AHMAD ANDISHA (AFGHANISTAN)  
 AMB. MS. SOCORRO FLORES LIERA (MEXICO)  
 AMB. MR. JURAJ PODHORSKY (SLOVAKIA)



\* To date a 117 UN member States have served as Human Rights Council members: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Angola, Armenia, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Bosnia and Herzegovina, Botswana, Brazil, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Congo, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, Cuba, Czechia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Denmark, Djibouti, Ecuador, Egypt, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Fiji, Finland, France, Gabon, Georgia, Germany, Ghana, Guatemala, Hungary, Iceland, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Libya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mali, Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Namibia, Nepal, Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Pakistan, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Russian Federation, Rwanda, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Africa, Somalia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sudan, Switzerland, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), Viet Nam, Zambia.

#### References:

UNHRC; UNHRC; shutterstock; UNDP/Sarabjit Dhillon; OHCHR/Danielle Kirby; shutterstock; UNIC/Nicholas Flack; shutterstock; UNDP/Sarabjit Dhillon; shutterstock; Prasenjit Chakma; UNHRC; UNHRC; UN Photo/Jean-Marc Ferré/Violaine Martin; Flaticon.





# UNITED NATIONS HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

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