



Human Rights Council

Information Service

United Nations Office in Geneva

What is the Human Rights Council?

The Human Rights Council is the body created by United Nations Member States to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights around the world. The Council replaces the UN Commission on Human Rights.

What makes the Human Rights Council different from its predecessor?

The Commission on Human Rights had many proud accomplishments, particularly in setting global human rights standards. But many new features make the Council an even stronger body. For example, the Commission's members were really selected behind closed doors and then "elected" by acclamation. By contrast, the new members of the Council had to compete for seats, and successful candidates needed to win the support of a majority of all member states, in a secret ballot. For the first time ever, candidates gave voluntary commitments to promote and uphold human rights, and will be expected to meet them or else face possible suspension from the Council.

The resolution establishing the Council also stresses the importance of ending double-standards, a problem that plagued the past Commission. Thus, the Council will also have a new universal periodic review mechanism, which will offer the Council - and the world - the opportunity to examine the records of all 191 member States of the United Nations. Unlike before, no country can escape scrutiny. This promises to be a very powerful tool for human rights advocates worldwide.

In addition, the Council will meet throughout the year, whereas the Commission's limited six-week schedule severely impaired its effectiveness and flexibility. With this precious additional time, the Council will be able to undertake preventive initiatives to defuse simmering crises, and to respond quickly to emerging human rights crises.

Who sits in the new Council?

On 9 May, 2006, 47 countries were elected members of the Council. The distribution of seats is in accordance with equitable geographical representation (13 from the African Group; 13 from the Asian Group; 6 from the Eastern European Group; 8 from the Latin American and Caribbean Group; and 7 from the Western European and Other States Group). For a full list of members, see <http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/membership.htm>

If some members of the Council have less than perfect human rights records, won't the Council fall victim to the same problems that plagued the Commission?

The Council, the members of which are elected in genuine competitive elections, is meant to work on the basis of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity. It is necessarily inclusive, as it has to conduct much of its work on the basis of dialogue and cooperation and that includes talking to and assisting countries that are seen to have specific rights problems. What is more, no country has a perfect human rights record, and all States must be accountable for their shortcomings. The test is not membership, but accountability and the demonstrated willingness of countries to provide redress and make improvements. These are the aims of the new Council and its mechanisms.

Will a new bureaucracy really lead to an improvement in human rights around the world?

It is true that a purely institutional change is not enough. For there to be a real impact, the members of the new Council must be prepared to look beyond their immediate political interests and embrace the cause of protecting human rights worldwide. That will require political will and principled leadership from every one of them. It will also require the engagement of civil society and the public in ensuring members live up to their commitments.

Could a Member have its rights and privileges suspended in the Council?

The General Assembly has the right to suspend the rights and privileges of any Council Member that it decides has persistently committed gross and systematic violations of human rights during its term of membership. This process of suspension requires a two-thirds majority vote by the General Assembly.

How long are the terms of membership?

Members are elected for three year terms. They are not eligible for immediate re-election after serving two consecutive terms.

Where will the Human Rights Council fit in within the United Nations system?

The Human Rights Council is a subsidiary body of the General Assembly. This makes it directly accountable to the full membership of the United Nations. During a review in five years time, member States will consider, among other questions, whether to elevate the Council to the status of a principal organ.

Where and how often will the Council meet?

While the old Commission met only once per year in a single six-week session, the Human Rights Council will hold no fewer than three sessions per year (including a main session) for a total period of no less than ten weeks. The Geneva-based Council will also be able to convene to deal with urgent situations, and to hold special sessions when necessary. Importantly, any Council member can call for a special session, and the support of only one-third of the Council membership is required to authorize the sitting.

Will non-governmental organizations and other observers participate in the proceedings of the Council as they did with the Commission on Human Rights?

Observers, including non-governmental organizations, intergovernmental organizations, national human rights institutions and specialized agencies, will participate in the Council through the same arrangements and practices that applied to the Commission.

How will the work of the special mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights (independent experts and special rapporteurs) be affected by the establishment of the Council?

The Council will carry over all the Commission's mandates and responsibilities to ensure that there is not a protection gap in the transition. A review will be completed within one year from the Council's first session. This review will examine ways to rationalize and strengthen the special procedures and mechanisms including the Sub-Commission of Commission on Human Rights on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights.

What will the relationship be between the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council?

The new Council will assume the same role and responsibilities of the Commission on Human Rights relating to the work of the Office of the High Commissioner. As such, the High Commissioner will retain her independent role under her separate General Assembly mandate, and the Office of the High Commissioner will provide the substantive secretariat for the Council, and will cooperate closely with the Council in promoting and protecting human rights.

How would you summarize the main objectives of the Human Rights Council?

The Council will be responsible for promoting universal respect for and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all. It will address violations, promote human rights assistance and education, help develop international human rights law, review the human rights records of member States, work to prevent abuses, respond to emergencies, and serve as an international forum for dialogue on human rights issues.

What will be accomplished at this first session?

The new Council will elect a President of the Council. In the first week a high-level segment will here from over 100 dignitaries. The High Commissioner for Human Rights will present her annual report to the new Council and engage in dialogue on human rights questions. The Council will hear from representatives of national human rights commissions, non-governmental human rights organizations, human rights treaty bodies, independent special procedures, and the Sub-Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights. The Council will aim to adopt its program of work for the first year.



Human Rights Council

Information Service

United Nations Office in Geneva

December 2004 -- The High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change convened by the SG in 2003 recommends changes to strengthen the Human Rights Commission. Presenting the conclusions of the Panel, the SG recalls the Organization's proud work in setting human rights standards, and expresses his hope that the Panel's recommend actions would be a basis for change.

March 2005 – In his report, *In Larger Freedom*, the SG declares that “If the United Nations is to meet the expectations of men and women everywhere — and indeed, if the Organization is to take the cause of human rights as seriously as those of security and development”, then Member States should replace the Commission on Human Rights with a stronger Human Rights Council.

April 2005 -- Detailing his proposal, the SG calls for a thorough reassessment of the effectiveness of UN intergovernmental machinery in addressing human rights concerns. He makes specific recommendations ahead of the World Summit to be convened later in the year regarding the mandate and function of the new Council as well as on its size, composition and place in the UN hierarchy.

September 2005 – The World Summit, the largest-ever gathering of Heads of State and Government, reaffirms the fundamental importance of human rights as the “third pillar” of the Organization, pledges to create a new Human Rights Council and agrees to double the budget of the UN human rights programme.

15 March 2006 – The General Assembly adopts, by a vote of 170 in favour, 4 against and 3 abstentions, resolution 60/251 setting up the Council. The date of the first session is set for 19 June 2006, to be preceded by the abolition of the Commission on 16 June 2006.

9 May 2006 – The Assembly elects the first 47 members of the Council.

19 June 2006 – First session of the Human Rights Council



Human Rights Council

Information Service

United Nations Office in Geneva

Membership of the Human Rights Council

On 9 May 2006, the United Nations General Assembly elected the first 47 members to the newly established Human Rights Council (HRC) whose term of office will begin on 19 June when the HRC holds its first meeting.

The Member States listed below announced their candidacies in writing and were elected directly and individually by a majority of the Members of the General Assembly. They shall not be eligible for immediate re-election after two consecutive terms (para.7 of resolution A/RES/60/251). (The date indicated next to the country is when their current term expires).

The Assembly decided that the terms of membership will be staggered, and that such a decision would be taken for the first election by the drawing of lots, taking into account equitable regional distribution. In that connection, after completing the elections, the Assembly drew lots to select, among the elected members in each regional group, those members who will serve for one, two or three years, respectively.

African States: Algeria (2007), Cameroon (2009), Djibouti (2009), Gabon (2008), Ghana (2008), Mali (2008), Mauritius (2009), Morocco (2007), Nigeria (2009), Senegal (2009), South Africa (2007), Tunisia (2007) and Zambia (2008)

Asian States: Bahrain (2007), Bangladesh (2009), China (2009), India (2007), Indonesia (2007), Japan (2008), Jordan (2009), Malaysia (2009), Pakistan (2008), Philippines (2007), Republic of Korea (2008), Saudi Arabia (2009) and Sri Lanka (2008)

Eastern European States: Azerbaijan (2009), Czech Republic (2007), Poland (2007), Romania (2008), Russian Federation (2009) and Ukraine (2008)

Latin American & Caribbean States: Argentina (2007), Brazil (2008), Cuba (2009), Ecuador (2007), Guatemala (2008), Mexico (2009), Peru (2008) and Uruguay (2009)

Western European & Other States: Canada (2009), Finland (2007), France (2008), Germany (2009), Netherlands (2007), Switzerland (2009) and United Kingdom (2008)



Human Rights Council

Information Service

United Nations Office in Geneva

A Historic Year for Human Rights in the United Nations

The new Human Rights Council, historic in its own right, is but one of several significant recent developments in the Organization's human rights programme.

In fact, the 2005 World Summit made human rights a central theme of its work, issuing an outcome document with more than 50 references to human rights, and reaffirming that the protection of human rights is one of the three pillars of the United Nations (alongside peace and security, and economic and social development), and that it is essential to the other two.

Many of the human rights provisions are concrete (such as the doubling of the human rights budget). Some are historic (including agreement on "the responsibility to protect" and, of course the mandating of a new Human Rights Council). Here are some highlights:

- ***A Breakthrough on the Responsibility to Protect:*** The first recording of a broad inter-governmental (global) consensus on "the responsibility to protect," acknowledging that sovereignty in the 21st century entails the responsibility to protect human rights, including an agreement that, where national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, the international community, acting through the United Nations, is responsible and empowered to act to ensure human rights protection.
- ***A Strengthened Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:*** The Summit embraced measures to ensure that the actual implementation of human rights advances on the ground is pursued by the United Nations with the seriousness intended by the Charter. It called for the (unprecedented) doubling of the budget of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, explicitly acknowledged the ambitious Plan of Action of the High Commissioner (a key plank of the reform agenda annexed to "In Larger Freedom") and supporting a closer relationship between the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Security Council.
- ***Advancing the Place of Human Rights in the UN System:*** The Summit issued a high-level intergovernmental mandate for mainstreaming human rights throughout the United Nations system, committed the UN to improving the effectiveness of the human rights treaty bodies, and called for more support to human rights education.

- ***Defending the Rights of Vulnerable, Persecuted, Deprived and Exploited Groups:*** The international community committed itself to step up efforts to combat poverty, and issued the first global reaffirmation of the right to development since 1993. It called on States to ensure that any measures taken to combat terrorism comply with their obligations under international human rights law. It promised a concerted international response to the scourge of human trafficking. It called for renewed efforts to eliminate gender based violence and pervasive gender discrimination in education, the ownership and inheritance of property, housing, access to reproductive health, labour rights, access to land, and access to government. And it called for renewed action to protect the human rights of migrants, children, indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, minorities, internally displaced persons and refugees.



Human Rights Council

Information Service

United Nations Office in Geneva

About OHCHR

OHCHR is a department of the United Nations Secretariat and works for the protection of all human rights for all people. It helps empower individuals to realize their rights and assists those in positions of responsibility to protect and promote the human rights of everyone. OHCHR gives priority to addressing the most pressing human rights problems, both acute and chronic, with particular emphasis on those human rights violations that put life in imminent peril. It devotes special attention for those who are at risk and vulnerable on multiple fronts, and places equal emphasis on civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. High Commissioner Louise Arbour of Canada heads OHCHR. She has been in office since July 2004. The post of High Commissioner for Human Rights was created in 1993. Headquartered in the historic 'Palais Wilson' in Geneva, Switzerland, the Office is present in over 40 countries and employs more than 600 staff worldwide.

For more information on OHCHR, please visit: www.ohchr.org.

About the Human Rights Treaty Bodies

The human rights treaty bodies are committees of independent experts that monitor implementation of the core international human rights treaties. They are created in accordance with the provisions of the treaty that they monitor and perform a number of functions including consideration of state parties' reports and of complaints and communications by individuals. There are seven human rights treaty bodies:

The Human Rights Committee (HRC) monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966 and its optional protocols;

The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) monitors implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights 1966;

The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) monitors implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination 1965;

The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) monitors implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women 1979;

The Committee Against Torture (CAT) monitors implementation of the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment;

The Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) monitors implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 and its optional protocols; and

The Committee on Migrant Workers (CMW) monitors implementation of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families 1990.

Each treaty body receives secretariat support from the Treaties and Commission Branch of OHCHR in Geneva except CEDAW, which is supported by the Division for the Advancement of Women (DAW). CEDAW meets at United Nations headquarters in New York; the other treaty bodies generally meet at the United Nations Office in Geneva, although the Human Rights Committee usually holds its March session in New York.

For more information on the work of the Treaty Bodies, please visit:
<http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/treaty/index.htm>

About the Special Procedures

The fact-finding and investigatory mechanisms of the Council are collectively known as the special procedures. These include special rapporteurs, special representatives and experts, and working groups mandated by the Council and/or the United Nations Economic and Social Council, with the aim of documenting human rights violations. Mandate-holders are independent experts appointed to investigate specific types of human rights violations and conduct studies on particular themes and situations from a human rights perspective. The strength of the special procedures lies in their independence. The work of these special rapporteurs and the working groups in drawing the attention of Member States and the public to human rights violations in certain countries or to specific human rights issues is integral to human rights protection.

For more information on the work of the Special Procedures, please visit:
<http://www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/chr/special/>

Note to correspondents

NOTE/06/10

14 June 2006

FIRST SESSION OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Information for Media Coverage of the Session

The Human Rights Council will held its first session from 19 to 30 June 2006 at the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG).

The opening of the session will be held in the Assembly Hall on 19 June, and the Council will continue to meet at that location until 23 June. The rest of the meetings of the Council will be held in room XVIII of E building. A press gallery is reserved on a balcony of the 5th floor on the Lausanne side and correspondents are asked not to circulate around the Assembly Hall after the beginning of the meeting.

The information below is aimed at facilitating the work of accredited correspondents covering the Council's proceedings.

This note will be updated as necessary.

Media Accreditation

Correspondents who wish to obtain accreditation should send photocopies of the following documents: a valid professional press card, an identity card or passport, and a letter of assignment from the Editor-in-Chief of the media organization concerned. These documents must be faxed to Ms. Elena Ponomareva-Piquier, Chief of Press and External Relations Section, Information Service (fax number +41 (0)22 917 0073). Ms. Ponomareva-Piquier can be reached at +41 (0)22 917 2336. Ms. Dalmas-Fegli, Information Assistant, can be reached at +41 (0)22 917 2313.

Security passes can be picked up from the Identification Unit of the Division of Security and Safety Services located at the visitor's entrance to the Palais des Nations (Pregny Gate).

United Nations Press Releases and Meetings Coverage

Background press releases in English and French will be available in the press room 1 and in the Documentation Centre (Room C.329)

The Information Service of the United Nations will provide continuous, in-depth coverage of the work of the Council in English and French. The press releases summarizing each public meeting of the Council will be available in press room 1 and in the Documentation Centre (Room C.329). For any questions concerning the press releases, please call Thierry Potvin, Editor (French) (+41 (0)22 917 2311) or Dalia Baligh, Editor (English) (+41 (0)22 917 2310) . For information on distribution of hard copies of the press releases, please call François Richer (+41 (0)22 917 4359).

All press releases of the Information Service will be available as soon as they are finalized, in English and French, on the Internet site of the United Nations Office at Geneva (www.unog.ch/news).

Media Liaison

The Spokesperson of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr. José-Luis Díaz, will be available during the session. Mr. Diaz can be contacted at +41 (0)22 917 9242, (jdiaz@ohchr.org). Ms. Praveen Randhawa can also offer assistance to correspondents. Please contact Ms. Randhawa at +41 (0)22 917 9602 (prandhawa@ohchr.org).

Ms. Renata Sivacolundhu can offer assistance to correspondents concerning the arrangement of interviews with participating dignitaries during the first week of the Council. Please contact Ms. Sivacolundhu at +41 (0)22 917 1905 (sivacolundhu@un.org).

Mr. Rolando Gomez will liaise with the Chairman of the first session of the Council and the Bureau of the Council. He can be reached at + 41 (0) 22 917 2326 (rgomez@unog.ch).

Media Centre

A Media Centre will be set up from 19 to 30 June in hall 13/15 (second floor, Building A). The Centre will contain some 20 workstations for journalists with temporary Council accreditation, including computers equipped with wireless connections, cable Internet links for laptops, electrical outlets and two telephones with local service.

Documentation

Documents of the Council will be made available to correspondents as soon as they are published in press room 1.

For further information on documents, journalists can obtain assistance from the Documentation Centre of the Information Service, Room C.329 (telephone +41 (0)22 917 2304 or 2305).

Council documents will also be available in English, French and Spanish, on the website of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at www.ohchr.org.

Press Conferences

Press conferences at the Palais des Nations will be organized throughout the Council involving United Nations officials, as well as speakers invited to address the Council and representatives of Member States. Press conferences will be announced on the board in press room 1, on the internal public address system and on the UNOG website (www.unog.ch/news).

Attendance at press conferences will be strictly limited to accredited correspondents and the only exceptions will be members of the delegation giving the press conference and the United Nations information staff designated to cover it.

Radio

Upon their request for accreditation, radio correspondents are asked to contact Ms. Yvette Morris, Chief of the Radio and Television Section, who can be reached at +41 (0)22 917 4606 or at +41 (0)79 217 3064.

The UN Radio Studios are operational from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Reservations are required in advance. To reserve a studio, please call +41 (0)22 917 2566/1077.

Audio mult-boxes will be available in the press gallery in the Assembly Hall and in Conference Room XVIII.

Television

Access to the Assembly Hall

Cameramen and photographers will have access to the floor of Assembly for the first five minutes of the session on 19 June. Cameramen may film on the shoulder only. For the remainder of the proceedings in the Assembly Hall, camera crews may cover from the press gallery in the fifth floor balcony on the Lausanne side of the Hall. Audio mult-boxes will be available.

Access to the Conference Room XVIII

Television crews accompanied by UN staff will be able to take general views of the Conference Room. Access to the centre of the room is restricted to the UN television crew and one other television crew at a time. Priority will be given to television teams from the same country as the speaker addressing the Council.

Facilities

UN Television will provide coverage of statements in Pal, Betacam, DV and DVCAM to interested television and documentary producers. Coverage requests should be made in writing, in advance. Coverage requests and bookings for television studio and transmission facilities should be sent to:

UN Television
Room E.10,
Palais des Nations,
8-14 Avenue de La Paix
CH 1211-Geneva 10
Fax: 41 22 917 0031
Email: untv@unog.ch

Photographers

Photographers will work in areas on the floor designated by Information staff . Pool coverage may be arranged as needed.

For further information, please contact Yvette Morris (+41 (0)22 917 4606 or +41 (0)79 217 3064).

The public will have access through the webcast to all public meetings of the Human Rights Council during the first week of the session. The webcast will only be available in the language of the floor.

Useful numbers

The following numbers and other information will be helpful to correspondents covering the Council:

<u>Name and Title</u>	<u>Room No.</u>	<u>Telephone</u>	<u>E.mail address</u>	<u>Fax No.</u>
Marie HEUZÉ , Director, Spokesperson for the United Nations at Geneva	C.302	022.917 2302 079-333 2120	mheuze@unog.ch	022.917 0030
Elena PONOMAREVA- PIQUIER , Chief, Press and External Relations Section	C.300	022.917 2336 079-217 3065	eponomareva@unog.ch	022.917 0030
Rolando GOMEZ , Liaison with the Chairman and the Bureau	C. 315	022 917 2326 079 477 0880	rgomez@unog.ch	022.917 0030
Renata Sivacolundhu , Arranging interviews with dignitaries attending the Council	C.309	022 917 1905	sivacolundhu@un.org	022.917 0030
José Luis DIAZ , Spokesperson for the High Commissioner for Human Rights		022.917 7359 079-217 3009	jdiaz@ohchr.org	022.917 0353
Praveen RANDHAWA , Assistance to correspondents		022.917 9602 079-4444145	prandhawa@ohchr.org	022.917 0353
Thierry POTVIN , Editor, French Press Coverage	C.307	022.917 2311	tpotvin@unog.ch	022.917 0030
Dalia BALIGH , Editor, English Press Coverage	C.317	022.917 2310	dbaligh@unog.ch	022.917 0030
François RICHER Information clerk, Distribution of press materials	C.331	022.917 4359	fricher@unog.ch	022.917 0165

Catherine DALMAS-FEGLI , Information Assistant, Accreditation of journalists	C.323	022.917 2313 079-477 0865	cfegli@unog.ch	022.917 0073
Yvette MORRIS , Chief, Radio and TV Section	E.10-3	022.917 4606 079-217 3064	ymorris@unog.ch untv@unog.ch	022.917 0031
Luca SOLARI , Radio Engineer, Request for facilities	80	022.917.2566	lsolari@unog.ch	
François SUBIGER , Radio Engineer, Request for facilities	80	022.917 1077 076-593 5021	fsubiger@unog.ch	

(Calls placed from inside the Palais des Nations can be made by replacing "917" by "7"; when placing calls from outside Switzerland, please dial the country code (41) and omit the zero before the number above.)

* * * * *

For use of the information media; not an official record



Press release

Human Rights Council

Information Service

United Nations Office at Geneva

HRC/06/1
15 June 2006

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL BEGINS TO TAKE SHAPE **AS FIRST SESSION CONVENES IN GENEVA**

The first meeting of the newly established Human Rights Council opens in Geneva on Monday, 19 June, marking a new beginning for United Nations efforts to promote and protect fundamental freedoms worldwide.

This inaugural session, set to last until 30 June, will bring together high-level representatives from over 100 countries and see delegates begin concrete work to allow the Council to build on the recognized strengths of its predecessor -- the Commission on Human Rights -- and flesh out the features that make it a stronger and more effective human rights body. The meeting will take place just over a month following the open and competitive election of the Council's 47 members by the UN General Assembly in New York.

General Assembly President Jan Eliasson, who oversaw the intense negotiations that resulted in the creation of the new Council last March, said: "The establishment of the Human Rights Council shows that Member States can overcome differences and deliver outcomes relevant to the people of the world. I expect the members of the Council to address the challenges before them with the same constructive spirit and commitment. We must show the world that the Council means a fresh start in the United Nations' work for human rights."

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who proposed the establishment of a new Human Rights Council in his report leading up to the World Summit, said: "I am confident that the Council will open a new chapter in the history of the UN's work to promote and protect human rights, and I urge everyone to join in the effort to make that happen."

At this session and over the coming year, the Council will tackle a heavy workload, including establishing the format of the universal periodic review, the groundbreaking mechanism that will allow it to scrutinize the human rights records of all countries. The Council will also set in motion the process of reviewing all mandates and responsibilities of the previous Commission on Human Rights and defining other aspects of the Council's work, such as the system of special procedures, encompassing over 40 independent experts and groups who investigate issues relating to civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights or monitor the situation in specific countries.

(more)

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, said: “The Council is a momentous achievement, but the hard work is just beginning. The road ahead is fraught with challenges, but it also holds many opportunities. As they take up the solemn responsibility of reshaping the international human rights framework, I urge all Members to put aside narrow considerations and act in the interest of all the people whose rights they hold in trust.”

An Improved Framework

The resolution establishing the Human Rights Council provides the framework for a significant improvement in the work of promoting and protecting human rights worldwide:

- A “universal periodic review” will ensure that all 191 Member States of the United Nations, starting with the members of the Council itself, will have their records examined in order to improve human rights conditions worldwide. All states must be held accountable for their shortcomings.
- The Council will hold more meetings throughout the year and for longer total duration than the Commission. It will also have a simplified and more efficient mechanism to convene special sessions to respond promptly to human rights crises.
- As the Council is elected directly by the General Assembly, the new body reflects the high level of importance given to human rights as something belonging to all people and, alongside development and security, one of the three pillars of the United Nations.
- Any Council member who commits gross and systematic violations of human rights can have their rights of membership suspended by a two-thirds majority of the General Assembly.
- The first election of members to the Council on 9 May was the first indication that the new Council was not “business as usual”. Countries competed for seats in an open and fair election and, for the first time ever, candidates put forward voluntary pledges and comments to promote and uphold human rights to which they will be held accountable.

The Human Rights Council session will be webcast live from 19-22 June at www.un.org/webcast

For further information on the Human Rights Council session, including agenda, list of Council Members and other background materials, please visit: www.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/

For media enquiries, please contact:

Renata Sivacolundhu, Information Officer, UN Department of Public Information, tel. +41 22 917 1905
Rolando Gomez, Information Officer, UN Information Service at Geneva, tel. +41 22 917 2326 mobile:
+41 79 477 0880

* * * * *

(more)



Human Rights Council

Information Service

United Nations Office in Geneva

A/RES/60/251

United Nations
General Assembly

Distr.: General
3 April 2006
Sixtieth session
Agenda items 46 and 120
05-50266

Resolution adopted by the General Assembly
[without reference to a Main Committee (A/60/L.48)]
60/251. Human Rights Council

The General Assembly,

Reaffirming the purposes and principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations, including developing friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and achieving international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural or humanitarian character and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, *Reaffirming also* the Universal Declaration of Human Rights¹ and the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action,² and recalling the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,³ the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights³ and other human rights instruments,

Reaffirming further that all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing, and that all human rights must be treated in a fair and equal manner, on the same footing and with the same emphasis,

Reaffirming that, while the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, all States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, have the duty to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms,

Emphasizing the responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter, to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language or religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,

Acknowledging that peace and security, development and human rights are the pillars of the United Nations system and the foundations for collective security and well-being, and recognizing that development, peace and security and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing,

¹ Resolution 217 A (III).

² A/CONF.157/24 (Part I), chap. III.

³ See resolution 2200 A (XXI), annex.

Affirming the need for all States to continue international efforts to enhance dialogue and broaden understanding among civilizations, cultures and religions, and emphasizing that States, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, religious bodies and the media have an important role to play in promoting tolerance, respect for and freedom of religion and belief,

Recognizing the work undertaken by the Commission on Human Rights and the need to preserve and build on its achievements and to redress its shortcomings,

Recognizing also the importance of ensuring universality, objectivity and non-selectivity in the consideration of human rights issues, and the elimination of double standards and politicization,

Recognizing further that the promotion and protection of human rights should be based on the principles of cooperation and genuine dialogue and aimed at strengthening the capacity of Member States to comply with their human rights obligations for the benefit of all human beings,

Acknowledging that non-governmental organizations play an important role at the national, regional and international levels, in the promotion and protection of human rights,

Reaffirming the commitment to strengthen the United Nations human rights machinery, with the aim of ensuring effective enjoyment by all of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development, and to that end, the resolve to create a Human Rights Council,

1. *Decides* to establish the Human Rights Council, based in Geneva, in replacement of the Commission on Human Rights, as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly; the Assembly shall review the status of the Council within five years;

2. *Decides* that the Council shall be responsible for promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind and in a fair and equal manner;

3. *Decides also* that the Council should address situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and make recommendations thereon. It should also promote the effective coordination and the mainstreaming of human rights within the United Nations system;

4. *Decides further* that the work of the Council shall be guided by the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity, constructive international dialogue and cooperation, with a view to enhancing the promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development;

5. *Decides* that the Council shall, inter alia:

(a) Promote human rights education and learning as well as advisory services, technical assistance and capacity-building, to be provided in consultation with and with the consent of Member States concerned;

(b) Serve as a forum for dialogue on thematic issues on all human rights;

(c) Make recommendations to the General Assembly for the further development of international law in the field of human rights;

(d) Promote the full implementation of human rights obligations undertaken by States and follow-up to the goals and commitments related to the promotion and protection of human rights emanating from United Nations conferences and summits;

(e) Undertake a universal periodic review, based on objective and reliable information, of the fulfilment by each State of its human rights obligations and commitments in a manner which ensures universality of coverage and equal treatment with respect to all States; the review shall be a cooperative mechanism, based on an interactive dialogue, with the full involvement of the country concerned and with consideration given to its capacity-building needs; such a mechanism shall complement and not duplicate the work of treaty bodies; the Council shall develop the modalities and necessary time allocation for the universal periodic review mechanism within one year after the holding of its first session;

(f) Contribute, through dialogue and cooperation, towards the prevention of human rights violations and respond promptly to human rights emergencies;

(g) Assume the role and responsibilities of the Commission on Human Rights relating to the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, as decided by the General Assembly in its resolution 48/141 of 20 December 1993;

(h) Work in close cooperation in the field of human rights with Governments, regional organizations, national human rights institutions and civil society;

(i) Make recommendations with regard to the promotion and protection of human rights;

(j) Submit an annual report to the General Assembly;

6. *Decides also* that the Council shall assume, review and, where necessary, improve and rationalize all mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities of the Commission on Human Rights in order to maintain a system of special procedures, expert advice and a complaint procedure; the Council shall complete this review within one year after the holding of its first session;

7. *Decides further* that the Council shall consist of forty-seven Member States, which shall be elected directly and individually by secret ballot by the majority of the members of the General Assembly; the membership shall be based on equitable geographical distribution, and seats shall be distributed as follows among regional groups: Group of African States, thirteen; Group of Asian States, thirteen; Group of Eastern European States, six; Group of Latin American and Caribbean States, eight; and Group of Western European and other States, seven; the members of the Council shall serve for a period of three years and shall not be eligible for immediate re-election after two consecutive terms;

8. *Decides* that the membership in the Council shall be open to all States Members of the United Nations; when electing members of the Council, Member States shall take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto; the General Assembly, by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting, may suspend the rights of membership in the Council of a member of the Council that commits gross and systematic violations of human rights;

9. *Decides also* that members elected to the Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights, shall fully cooperate with the Council and be reviewed under the universal periodic review mechanism during their term of membership;

10. *Decides further* that the Council shall meet regularly throughout the year and schedule no fewer than three sessions per year, including a main session, for a total duration of no less than ten weeks, and shall be able to hold special sessions, when needed, at the request of a member of the Council with the support of one third of the membership of the Council;

11. *Decides* that the Council shall apply the rules of procedure established for committees of the General Assembly, as applicable, unless subsequently otherwise decided by the Assembly or the Council, and also decides that the participation of and consultation with observers, including States that are not members of the Council, the specialized agencies, other intergovernmental organizations and national human rights institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations, shall be based on arrangements, including Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996 and practices observed by the Commission on Human Rights, while ensuring the most effective contribution of these entities;

12. *Decides also* that the methods of work of the Council shall be transparent, fair and impartial and shall enable genuine dialogue, be results-oriented, allow for subsequent follow-up discussions to recommendations and their implementation and also allow for substantive interaction with special procedures and mechanisms;

13. *Recommends* that the Economic and Social Council request the Commission on Human Rights to conclude its work at its sixty-second session, and that it abolish the Commission on 16 June 2006;

14. *Decides* to elect the new members of the Council; the terms of membership shall be staggered, and such decision shall be taken for the first election by the drawing of lots, taking into consideration equitable geographical distribution;

15. *Decides also* that elections of the first members of the Council shall take place on 9 May 2006, and that the first meeting of the Council shall be convened on 19 June 2006;

16. *Decides further* that the Council shall review its work and functioning five years after its establishment and report to the General Assembly.