



**DEMOCRACY
COALITION
PROJECT**

For immediate release: May 17, 2007
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**Standards Upheld by UN General Assembly on
Human Rights Council Elections**

Belarus defeated in hotly contested Eastern Europe race

May 17, 2007 – The Democracy Coalition Project welcomed the defeat of Belarus in today’s UN General Assembly election of 14 members of the UN Human Rights Council as an important precedent for upholding basic standards for human rights. Belarus, a highly controversial candidate opposed by Belarusian human rights defenders as well as the Democracy Coalition Project (DCP) and an international coalition of over 40 groups for its appalling human rights record, was defeated by Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina in a hotly contested race for the two seats from Eastern Europe.

In the first round, Slovenia received 168 votes and secured a seat on the Council, but Belarus and Bosnia-Herzegovina both failed to receive the absolute majority (97 affirmative votes) necessary to claim a seat – 78 and 95, respectively. In the second round, Belarus’ vote count dropped to 72, but Bosnia received 112 votes, easily taking Eastern Europe’s second seat.

While Belarus’ defeat represents a positive step for the world body, the lack of competitive slates for the Asian, African and Latin American/Caribbean seats led to mixed results. Only two regions of the UN’s regional bloc system put forward competitive slates in this year’s election – the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG) and Eastern Europe (EE). Bosnia-Herzegovina entered the two-way race in Eastern Europe at the eleventh hour, joining Belarus and Slovenia, and providing hope for advocates working vigorously against a Belarusian victory.

While other countries with problematic records were elected, such as Egypt, Qatar, and Angola, the vote pattern for each region reflects a comparative preference for states with better human rights records. A similar outcome was found in last year’s election when states like China, Cuba and Algeria received comparatively fewer votes than other successful candidates. This pattern reflects a willingness on the part of UN member states to uphold the standards of Resolution 60/251 it adopted last year

when it created the Human Rights Council, which calls on states to select candidates on the basis of their contribution to the promotion and protection of human rights.

“Today’s result sends a clear message to Belarus that it must substantially improve its human rights record if it is to be considered a worthy candidate for Council membership in the future. It also is a testament to our collective work over the past two years to hold governments accountable to basic international human rights standards they themselves have adopted. We hope all governments, including the government in Minsk, will view this process as a force for change and progress on human rights both globally and nationally,” said Ted Piccone, Executive Director of the Democracy Coalition Project.

The Democracy Coalition Project welcomes the pledges made by all new members to the Council, but reminds all members – new and current - to implement their pledges, and live up to their obligations to cooperate with the Council and its mechanisms. Many members and candidates, for example, currently have not responded to requests for visits by UN experts, including Egypt, Pakistan, Tunisia, Bangladesh, and Algeria.

Human rights groups continue to call for competitive elections in all regions in order to provide real choice among UN Member states on which states are best fit to serve on the new UN human rights body. Last year, both the Group of Latin America and Caribbean countries (GRULAC) and the Asian group held competitive elections; however, both regions this year disappointed human rights advocates by joining Africa in putting forward a clean slate of candidates.

The highlight of this year’s election was a vigorous campaign launched by an international civil society coalition to prevent Belarus’ election to the Council. The groups successfully argued that a country condemned just four months ago by the UN General Assembly for widespread human rights abuses and a failure to cooperate with UN special procedures could not be elected by the same body to the world’s most important human rights forum.

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