



## **Human rights experts and NGOs seek to strengthen HRC**

As the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) undertakes its five-year review, governments, NGOs, and human rights experts are re-examining its effectiveness in promoting and protecting human rights.

The Intergovernmental Working Group mandated to review the work and functioning of the HRC since its creation in 2006 concluded its first session last week in Geneva, Switzerland. At the session, states discussed proposals on key aspects of the HRC; including the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), a mechanism developed to assess the human rights situations of all UN Member States; and Special Procedures, which generally refers to the body of human rights experts mandated by the HRC to work on country or thematic issues.

In conjunction with the meeting, human rights experts and NGOs submitted recommendations designed to improve the ability of these mechanisms to address human rights situations, as well as to enhance state cooperation with these tools.

### **NGOs make recommendations to strengthen Universal Periodic Review**

Recognizing the critical role the UPR plays in highlighting the human rights records of all UN Member States, UPR Info, with the support of the Open Society Foundations - Budapest, released an [analytical assessment](#) of the UPR process. The paper, based on the review of 112 States during the past seven UPR sessions, concludes that the effectiveness of the UPR depends on the full collaboration of all stakeholders. It also makes practical recommendations for strengthening the new mechanism.

Many of these recommendations are highlighted in a joint submission to the HRC review process by 37s NGOs, including the Democracy Coalition Project. [Seven key issues of the UPR](#) were presented by the NGOs which require the specific attention of the HRC: 1) robust and standardized national consultations; 2) introduction of OHCHR and NGO compilations and summaries during the review; 3) more action-oriented recommendations by states with particular attention to those which are legally binding; 4) improved state responses to recommendations; 5) enhanced follow-up assessment with participation of civil society; 6) assessment of implementation of recommendations during the second UPR cycle and; 7) greater participation of non-UN accredited NGOs.

To view the submission on the Seven key issues of the UPR please visit [http://www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/Joint\\_NGO\\_contribution\\_on\\_the\\_UPR-Seven\\_Key\\_Issues.pdf](http://www.upr-info.org/IMG/pdf/Joint_NGO_contribution_on_the_UPR-Seven_Key_Issues.pdf).



## **On Human Rights, Send in the Experts**

In a Huffington Post op-ed, "[On Human Rights, Send in the Experts](#)", co-authors Ted Piccone and Emily Alinikoff of the Brookings Institution discuss the importance of the UN Special Procedures - a system of expert volunteers set up in the late 1970s to investigate, report, and make recommendations on human rights situations around the world. Described as "the crown jewel" of the UN human rights system, Piccone and Alinikoff state that there is convincing evidence that the system has led governments to re-examine and correct actions that violated human rights across a broad range of categories.

"By shedding light on issues like the fate of the disappeared, mistreatment of political prisoners, fair access to health services and violence against women, these monitors tackle the hard issues and elevate them to the highest levels of political power," the authors assert. "That alone has an impact in creating a public record about abuses that some would like to hide, increasing pressure for remedies, and perhaps more importantly giving a voice to victims."

In a recent study, [Catalysts for Rights](#), Piccone consults with an Expert Advisory Group of practitioners, academics, lawyers, and activists, to provide the following concrete recommendations on how to further enhance the work of Special Procedures:

- creation of a public list of each state's record of responding to Special Procedures' communications, reports and requests for visits;
- giving priority to states with positive records of cooperation with the HRC for technical assistance and HRC membership;
- developing a more inclusive and transparent selection process for independent experts;
- allotting more time to mandate-holders to present their reports;
- publishing communications, reports and government responses in the main languages of the country concerned;
- requesting progress reports from the state concerned on the recommendations of Special Procedures;
- increasing funding to mandate holders to conduct more country visits, hire more staff, and receive additional training; and
- requesting mandate holders to participate in the UPR reviews of countries they have recently visited.

Piccone and Alinikoff call for the creation of more mandates to monitor serious situations around the world.

"Later this fall, the UN will take up resolutions on Iran and Burma, opening the door for appointing independent experts and commissions of inquiry to deal with the longstanding and deteriorating human rights situations in these countries," the authors note. "For the sake of victims there and around the world, the international community should send in the experts."



To view an alternative NGO paper on the HRC Review as it relates to the Special Procedures, please go to [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/10\\_SP\\_principles4\\_May\\_2010.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/10_SP_principles4_May_2010.pdf).

### **NGOs propose that independent actors bring issues to the HRC**

A growing contention among select UN member states is that the work of the HRC should solely be based on the principles of cooperation, non-selectivity and genuine dialogue; arguing that country specific human rights resolutions without the consent of the State concerned run contrary to these aims. However, members of the human rights community counter that cooperative approaches are only effective when the concerned state acknowledges and seeks to address human rights abuses. Unfortunately, this principled commitment to protect human rights is often neglected at the HRC.

In a [paper](#) sent to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the HRC President, 16 NGOs, including the Democracy Coalition Project, seek to resolve the charge of "selectivity" when addressing particular country situations. Currently the different methods to bring a country issue of concern to the attention of the HRC are all state-driven. The signatories suggest that the following independent institutions or mechanisms be allowed to bring issues to the HRC's attention for debate:

- a. The UN Secretary-General
- b. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
- c. The President of the Human Rights Council
- d. A group of at least five Special Procedures

The signatories emphasized that these actors would be required to explain why it is important for the HRC to consider the issue. The outcomes of the discussions would be determined by member states.

To view the NGO paper please visit <http://www.demcoalition.org/site09-2008/pdf/pdf/Cooperation%20NGO%20proposal%202011%20Review.pdf>.

### **Local NGOs identify key concerns on the functioning of the HRC**

To enhance the relevance of the HRC 2011 review to the needs and experiences of victims and human rights defenders on the ground, the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development, the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies, Conectas Direitos Humanos, and the International Service for Human Rights, developed a [survey](#) to solicit the views of local and national NGOs who have had prior experience with the work of the HRC.

The preliminary results of the survey were then presented during the first session of the Intergovernmental Working Group on the HRC review. The following areas were prioritized by NGOs as requiring improvement for the HRC to more effectively carry out its mandate:



- slow response of the HRC to human rights emergencies;
- states responding to interests of political groups rather than human rights causes;
- inadequate implementation of resolutions and states' human rights obligations;
- insufficient UPR consultation process with all relevant stakeholders at the national level;
- lack of effective follow-up mechanisms to UPR recommendations;
- financial constraints and limited capacity of NGOs to attend HRC sessions; and limited participation of NGOs during UN debates.

**NGOs call for a robust response by UN General Assembly to human rights violations in Iran**

In a [joint statement](#) to the UN General Assembly, six human rights organizations call for stronger follow-up mechanisms to address the critical human rights situation in Iran.

The statement highlights the brutal campaign of repression in Iran since its disputed 2009 Presidential elections, as well as the Iranian authorities' refusal to cooperate with existing international human rights mechanisms.

"Such evidence requires a robust response by the international community to respond to the failure of the Iranian authorities to address such serious human rights concerns and their obstruction of international scrutiny," assert the signatories.

The NGOs urge for the adoption of a resolution that:

- requests the Secretary-General to issue a more comprehensive report on Iran and to report periodically to the HRC on the situation;
- urges UN independent experts to report to the HRC periodically; and
- appoints a special envoy of the Secretary General to investigate and report on the human rights situation in Iran.

The signatories include the Democracy Coalition Project, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, the International Campaign for Human Rights in Iran, the International Federation for Human Rights, and the Iranian League for the Defense of Human Rights.

To view the statement please go to <http://www.demcoalition.org/site09-2008/pdf/pdf/NGO%20statement%20for%20GA%20Iran%20mechanism.pdf>.