

17 April 2009

The Honorable Hillary Clinton
United States Secretary of State
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Secretary Clinton:

We are very happy to welcome the candidacy of the United States for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council. As advocates committed to the defense of human rights and to the effective use of multilateral tools in U.S. foreign policy, we strongly agree with your conclusion that "working from within, [the U.S.] can make the council a more effective forum to promote and protect human rights."

Human rights defenders from around the world are also encouraged by U.S. reengagement. Bahey Eldin Hassan, Director of the Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies and a leading Arab human rights advocate, argues that "sustained and strategic engagement by the United States at the Human Rights Council is crucial to counter the growing power of authoritarian and repressive governments at this body."

The U.S. campaign for a seat on the Council has the potential to result not only in a U.S. victory, but also increased U.S. influence on the workings of the Council. We urge you to seize the opportunity offered by the campaign to make substantive voluntary pledges and commitments that will positively shape the U.S.'s reception at the Council. We are confident that the Department of State is paying close attention to the suggested elements for voluntary pledges and commitments produced by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The following specific pledges would be a forceful demonstration of U.S. recommitment to UN human rights institutions:

- » Affirm the President's commitments on detention, treatment of prisoners, and interrogation, with special reference to U.S. commitments under international law, including the Convention against Torture and the Geneva Conventions;
- » Invite all relevant UN special procedures holders to visit all U.S. detention facilities, including U.S. Naval Station Guantanamo Bay, without onerous restrictions or preconditions which would prejudice the special procedure holders' ability to conduct their inquiries;
- » Reiterate the President's commitment to request the Senate's consent to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- » Commit to budget for the full payment of assessed UN dues for Council operations and for continued voluntary contributions to the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights;

- » Plan for a model process of civil society consultations in preparation for U.S. review under the Universal Periodic Review in 2010; and,
- » Endorse the competitive election process outlined in General Assembly Resolution 60/251, including the criteria for membership.

On 4 March, the U.S. representative told the Council that “we will seek to assure the power of the Human Rights Council—and indeed the United Nations—is used to promote and protect the human rights of all.” The U.S. campaign for a seat on the Council is a first and critical opportunity to achieve that ambition.

Respectfully,

Dokhi Fassihian
Executive Director
Democracy Coalition Project

Tom Malinowski
Washington Advocacy Director
Human Rights Watch

Stephen Rickard
Executive Director
Open Society Policy Center

Karin Ryan
Director, Human Rights Program
The Carter Center

- cc. The Honorable Susan Rice, United States Representative to the United Nations
The Honorable Esther Brimmer, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organizations
Karen Stewart, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
Samantha Power, Senior Director for Multilateral Affairs, National Security Council