



US urged to support HRC Special Sessions on Bahrain and Yemen

Kuwait replaces Syria as candidate to the HRC due to intense international opposition

Following strong US-led action at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) against the violent crackdown on peaceful protesters in Syria, prominent US NGOs are [calling](#) on the Obama Administration to demonstrate the same resolve toward violations by US allies, Bahrain and Yemen, and seek HRC Special Sessions to address these human rights crises.

More than 600 Bahrainis have been detained or disappeared since state security forces, backed by troops from Saudi Arabia, began a campaign to punish and crush all dissent. Meanwhile, security forces and pro-government assailants in Yemen have killed more than one hundred people since peaceful demonstrations began in mid-February.

"Not only have state security forces in these countries responded to pro-democracy protests with violence and repression similar to that used by the Syrian government; but also, in Bahrain, the government is pursuing a vicious policy of punitive retribution against any Bahraini who supported the pro-democracy protests there," the NGOs said in a letter addressed to US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

While the NGOs commended US efforts to obtain robust HRC actions on Syria, Libya and Iran, they urged the United States government to combat charges of selectivity by signaling clear support for the convening of HRC Special Sessions on Bahrain and Yemen that would establish mechanisms to investigate human rights violations in those countries.

"It is necessary to demonstrate that the Council can consistently and uniformly uphold international human rights law, even when it is strategic allies of the United States who are responsible for serious human rights crimes," the NGOs asserted.

Kuwait replaces Syria as candidate to HRC due to intense international opposition

After months of international outcry over Syria's candidacy to the UN Human Rights Council (HRC), Kuwait has stepped forward to replace Syria as the preferred Asian Group candidate to the HRC elections, which will be held by secret ballot on May 20 at the UN General Assembly.

Previously, Syria was one of only four candidates (along with India, Indonesia and the Philippines) selected to fill the four Asian seats on the HRC. With Kuwait vying for

a seat, Syria ended its controversial campaign for membership rather than face an embarrassing defeat in a competitive election.

While concerns exist about Kuwait's human rights record, the international human rights community had strongly opposed Syria's candidacy, including several Syrian and Arab NGOs that [urged](#) the League of Arab States and the Asian Group to withdraw their support for Syria's membership bid.

The World Forum for Democratization in Asia also [expressed](#) dismay over the prospect of Syria representing the Asian region at the HRC. "While no country is completely free of human rights issues, the idea that a government which is right in the midst of committing massive atrocities against its own citizens would be chosen as a new member of the HRC blatantly violates the intent of the Council's creation," the group stated.

The announcement follows on the heels of the April 29 Special Session on Syria, where the HRC passed a resolution condemning the use of lethal violence against peaceful protestors by Syrian authorities. The resolution dispatches a fact-finding mission to be led by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which must report on any violations of international human rights law at future HRC sessions.

For more information regarding the upcoming HRC elections, please visit the website of the NGO Coalition for an Effective Human Rights Council by clicking [here](#).

Members of US Congress call on Obama to lead the establishment of an inquiry into crimes in Burma

Ongoing atrocities committed by Burmese authorities have prompted 31 bi-partisan members of the United States Congress to call on the Obama Administration to lead the establishment of an international commission of inquiry into grave human rights abuses in Burma.

In a [letter](#) addressed to President Obama, Members of the House of Representatives described the Burmese military campaign against ethnic minorities, including widespread rape, summary executions, conscription of child soldiers, forced labor and the internal displacement of more than one million people. "For too many years, the military in Burma has carried out with impunity acts which unambiguously constitute war crimes and crimes against humanity," the Members stated.

The Representatives acknowledged the Administration's previous statement supporting an international investigation, but stressed the need for immediate action in light of the mounting evidence of systematic crimes against humanity committed by Burma's military regime.

"With 16 countries, including the United States, already pledging support for a [UN] Commission, we believe the time has come to once and for all make this happen," the letter stated. "We strongly urge you to redouble United States efforts, at the highest level, to establish the Commission."

At the April 14, 2011 Congressional Briefing on US leadership at the HRC sponsored by the Democracy Coalition Project, Executive Director of the Burma Fund Dr. Thaug Htun also [called](#) on the Obama Administration to extend the necessary political will toward the establishment of an investigation mechanism.

For a full transcript of the briefing, please click [here](#).