

March 25, 2009

To: Asian delegations to the United Nations

Your Excellency,

As a diverse coalition of human rights organizations, we write in advance of the 2009 Human Rights Council elections to urge Asian states to present a competitive slate for election to the Council.

General Assembly resolution 60/251, which established the Council, specifies that Council members shall be elected directly and individually, and that, in casting their ballots, Member States “shall take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments.” These provisions underline the spirit of the resolution: that UN Member States be given a real choice in the elections to select members that “uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights” and “fully cooperate with the Council.”

As organizations that have closely followed and supported the Council’s development, we believe it is essential to the Council’s success that candidates be assessed on the basis of their human rights records and pledges. “Clean slates,” where the same number of candidates is presented as seats available in the region, undermine this principle and permit Council members to effectively be selected on the basis of rotation or reciprocal vote trading agreements. By contrast, competitive slates allow UN Member States to elect the best candidates proposed from each region of the world. We therefore support competitive slates in every region.

In two of the past three elections, the Asian region has enjoyed spirited, competitive elections for the seats allotted to it. For the 2009 election, we hope to see Asian states again present a competitive slate. However, we are very concerned by reports that the region may run a clean slate with five candidates for the five seats available in the region. We therefore urge states that believe they could, if elected, make a real contribution to the Council to come forward and campaign for election. There are still several months before the Council election, ample time to organize a campaign.

By running a competitive election, Asian states would send a strong signal that they are committed to principled Human Rights Council elections in which candidates can be judged by their dedication to promoting human rights. We firmly believe that a competitive slate would be to the benefit of Asian states, and the region more generally, and hope to see such an election.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Representatives of the undersigned organizations would be pleased to meet with you to discuss the upcoming elections.

Sincerely,

Hannah Forster, Executive Director, African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies

Yap See Seng, Executive Director, Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)

Basil Fernando, Executive Director, Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

Bani Dugal, Principal Representative, Baha'i International Community

Nabeel Rajab, President, Bahrain Center for Human Rights

Moataz El Fegiery, Executive Director, Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)

Karin Ryan, Director, Human Rights Program, The Carter Center

Ingrid Srinath, Secretary General, CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation

Juan Carlos Gutiérrez, Executive Director, Comisión Mexicana de Defensa y Promoción de los Derechos Humanos, A.C. (Mexican Commission for the Defence and Promotion of Human Rights)

Maja Daruwala, Director, Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative

Lucia Nader, International Relations Coordinator, Conectas Direitos Humanos

Radwan Ziadeh, Director, Damascus Center for Human Rights Studies in Syria

Dokhi Fassihian, Executive Director, Democracy Coalition Project

Hassan Shire Sheikh, Chairperson, East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (EHAHRD-Net)

Hossam Bahgat, Director, Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights

Souhayr Belhassen, President, FIDH – Fédération internationale des ligues des droits de l'Homme/International Federation for Human Rights

Paula Schriefer, Director of Advocacy, Freedom House

Tad Stahnke, Director of Policy and Programs, Human Rights First

Iain Levine, Program Director, Human Rights Watch

Hélène Sackstein, Permanent Representative, International Alliance of Women

Dr. Gyarmati István, Ambassador, Professor, President & CEO, International Centre for Democratic Transition (ICDT)

Dr. Lukas Machon, Representative to the United Nations, International Commission of Jurists

Isabelle Scherer, Executive Director, International Service for Human Rights

Jarrett Blanc, Sr. Policy Analyst, Multilateral Affairs, Open Society Institute.

Eric Sottas, Secretary General, Organisation Mondiale contre la Torture/ World Organisation against Torture

Andrew Albertson, Executive Director, Project on Middle East Democracy

Carlos E. Ponce S., General Coordinator, Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe para la Democracia

Vo Van Ai, President, Vietnam Committee on Human Rights

Bo Tedards, Coordinator, World Forum for Democratization in Asia

CC:

- Secretary-General of the United Nations
- President of General Assembly