

3 May 2007

Your Excellency,

General Assembly resolution 60/251, establishing the Human Rights Council (the Council), calls for a Council membership committed to uphold the highest human rights standards and to fully cooperate with the Council. The resolution specifies that Council members shall be elected directly and individually, and that 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 with the strongest commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights and to cooperation with the Council.

As NGOs who have closely followed and supported the Council’s development, we are extremely concerned to note that, with one exception, members of the General Assembly will not be able to choose amongst competing declared candidates on a comparative basis, since in four out of the five electoral regions, the number of candidates declared so far equals no more than the number of seats available for those regions. As a result, many Council members might be selected on the basis of rotation or reciprocal vote trading agreements rather than the comparative assessment of human rights records and pledges intended by resolution 60/251. We therefore appeal to States in all regions to ensure that there are more candidates than seats available for the region. Moreover, when candidates fall short of the highest standards for human rights observance set out in resolution 60/251, the only way for Member States to honor the membership standards will be by withholding votes from an unqualified candidate, including, if necessary, by casting a blank ballot for seats in those regions where the number of candidacies equals the number of available seats.

**We therefore call on all members of the General Assembly:**

- to give immediate attention to ensuring that there will be more candidates to contest the elections than there are vacant seats to fill in each region;
- to ensure that the regional groups to which they belong will not discourage or prevent additional candidates in the region from standing in the forthcoming elections;
- to elect new members to the Council on the basis of their human rights record and commitment to protect and promote human rights internationally and nationally and to cooperate with the Council, while excluding “reciprocal arrangements,” or vote-trading between states;
- to reject candidate countries which do not fully meet the standards for membership on the Council (to uphold the highest standards of human rights, and fully cooperate with the Council) by either writing in a qualified undeclared country or casting a blank ballot as to that seat;
- to issue, if they are candidates in the forthcoming elections, substantive pledges that are concrete, credible and measurable and that address the *Suggested Elements for Voluntary Pledges and Commitments by Candidates for Election to the Human Rights Council*, prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights<sup>1</sup>; and



<sup>1</sup> The Suggested Elements for Voluntary Pledges and Commitments by Candidates for Election to the Human Rights Council can be accessed at: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/13042006.pdf>. See also the letters addressed by the Federation internationale des ligues des droits de l’Homme addressed to all members of the General Assembly on 12 April 2007 and the letter addressed by Amnesty International to all members of the General Assembly on 16 April 2007.

- to encourage the General Assembly to take long-term measures to provide genuine plurality of choice in future elections, for example by ensuring that there will be twice as many candidates than the number of available seats in the region.

We look forward to a principled election in which new Council members will be elected that live up to the high expectations articulated in General Assembly resolution 60/251.

Representatives of the undersigned organizations would be pleased to meet with you to discuss the upcoming elections .

Sincerely,

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CC:

- All Member States of the United Nations
- Secretary-General of the United Nations
- President of United Nations General Assembly