

**For Immediate Release**

## **UN: Hold Competitive Voting for Rights Body**

### ***Regional Groups Should Honor the Spirit of Council Membership Standards on Human Rights***

(New York, March 25, 2009) – More than 30 human rights organizations from around the world today wrote to each state in the United Nations' five regional groups to urge them to present competitive slates for election to the Human Rights Council. In public letters, the coalition said that regional groups should put forward more candidates than there are open seats to allow the universal membership of the United Nations to select the best candidates from each region.

“States should have a real choice in each region,” said Dokhi Fassihian, executive director of the Democracy Coalition Project. “A seat on the Human Rights Council is a prize that should be won by candidates, not a gift handed to them.”

On May 12, the United Nations General Assembly in New York will elect 18 new members to the 47-member council based in Geneva, the UN's leading human rights body. Resolution 60/251, which created the council, advises UN member states to take into account candidates' human rights records in casting their votes. In order to win, each candidate must secure an absolute majority of the General Assembly members – 97 votes.

The make-up of the council reflects the UN's geographic composition, and seats are allotted by regional group. The coalition of human rights groups expressed concern about reports that in three out of the UN's five regional groups, the number of candidates put forward equals the number of seats allotted to the region.

“There are states that could play a positive role in the council, but hang back because they are afraid to lose,” said Steve Crawshaw, UN advocacy director at Human Rights Watch. “They need to realize that without competition, the credibility of the council is severely damaged.”

The groups encouraged states “that believe they could, if elected, make a real contribution to the council to come forward” and enter the race for election in the three regions that currently are not competitive – Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Western Europe and others.

“There are so many strong, vibrant democracies in Latin America and the Caribbean,” said Carlos E. Ponce, general coordinator of the Red Latinoamericana y del Caribe para la Democracia, a network of more than 147 organizations and networks. “This region above all should send a strong message that competitive elections matter.”

The coalition said there were reports that members of the African regional group and the Eastern European regional group may run competitive slates.

“African states realize how important this opportunity is,” said Ingrid Srinath, secretary general of CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation. “They should show the world that a seat on the council is worth a little healthy competition.”

**To read the letters from the coalition of human rights organizations to the five regional groups, please see the following:**

- Eastern European group:  
<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/03/25/ngos-welcome-eastern-european-states-plans-hold-competitive-elections-un-rights-coun>
- Western European and others group:  
<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/03/25/ngos-urge-western-european-and-others-group-hold-competitive-elections-un-righths-cou>
- Asian group:  
<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/03/25/ngos-urge-asian-states-hold-competitive-elections-un-rights-council>
- African group:  
<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/03/25/ngos-welcome-african-states-plans-hold-competitive-elections-un-rights-council>
- Latin American and Caribbean group:  
<http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2009/03/25/ngos-urge-latin-american-and-caribbean-states-hold-competitive-elections-un-rights-c>

**For more of Human Rights Watch's work on the UN Human Rights Council, please visit:**  
<http://www.hrw.org/en/category/topic/united-nations/hrc>

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