

To Permanent Representatives of Member States of the UN General Assembly

18 September 2018

Member States of the UN should refrain from voting for candidates to the Human Rights Council that are unfit for membership

Excellencies,

Ahead of the next UN Human Rights Council (“HRC” or “the Council”) election, we, the undersigned national, regional and international civil society organisations, write to urge your delegation to refrain from voting for candidates that blatantly fail to fulfil the Council membership standards outlined in UN General Assembly (UNGA) resolution 60/251.

Paragraphs 8 and 9 of resolution 60/251 state that the UNGA:

8. Decides that the membership in the Council shall be open to all States Members of the United Nations; when electing members of the Council, Member States shall take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto [...];

9. Decides also that members elected to the Council shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights [and] fully cooperate with the Council [...].

We are concerned that several of the States that are running for election fail to fulfil minimal requirements with regard to both the promotion and protection of human rights and cooperation with the Council and other UN human rights bodies and mechanisms. Some of these candidates show a pattern of non-cooperation with the UN human rights system and attacks against UN Special Procedure Mandate-Holders that is incompatible with Council membership. Furthermore, some of this year’s candidates have engaged in acts of intimidation and reprisals against human rights defenders and civil society organizations, who play a key role in the Council’s work. Voting for these candidates would undermine the Council’s credibility and institutional integrity.

We urge you to treat human rights considerations and the substantive Council membership criteria outlined in resolution 60/251 as paramount in electing members to the Council, rather than engaging in vote trading or privileging political considerations over fundamental human rights.

In October 2018, the next HRC election will determine which States sit as Members of the Council in the next three years (2019-2021). Considering that States must receive a simple majority of votes (i.e., 97) to be elected, that voting takes place by secret ballot, and that electing States are under no obligation to vote for each and every candidate within a regional group, we urge your delegation to simply refrain from voting for unfit candidates. Doing so will require leaving the ballot blank for those candidate States your delegation considers unfit.

Sincerely,

African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)
African Centre for Justice and Peace Studies (ACJPS)
Americans for Democracy & Human Rights in Bahrain (ADHRB)
ARTICLE 19
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC)
Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)

CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)
Conectas Direitos Humanos
Connection e.V., Germany
DefendDefenders (the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
EEPA
Eritrea Focus
Eritrean Diaspora in East Africa (EDEA)
Eritrean Law Society (ELS)
Eritrean Movement for Democracy and Human Rights (EMDHR)
Geneva for Human Rights (GHR)
Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
Horn of Africa Civil Society Forum
Human Rights Association / İnsan Hakları Derneği (İHD)
Human Rights Concern - Eritrea (HRCE)
Human Rights House Foundation
Human Rights Law Centre
Human Rights Watch
Information Forum for Eritrea (IFE)
International Commission of Jurists
International Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (FIACAT)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU)
International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)
International Service for Human Rights
Network of Eritrean Women
PEN Eritrea
Reporters Without Borders (RSF)
Southern Africa Human Rights Defenders Network (SAHRDN)
World Organisation Against Torture (OMCT)
Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR)