

To: Members of the UN Human Rights Council

CC: Observer States of the UN Human Rights Council

13 January 2021

Re: Elections of the UN Human Rights Council President for the 15th cycle in 2021

Excellencies,

On 12 January 2021, the UN Human Rights Council (the Council) announced that a vote is expected by 15 January 2021 to elect the Council's President for the 15th cycle in 2021 from the Asia-Pacific Group. The State representatives who have put forward their candidacies are: Bahrain, Fiji and Uzbekistan.

While we do not take a position on individual candidates, we consider that it is imperative that the process be in line with the principles set out in General Assembly *Resolution 60/251* and the Council's Institution Building Package, which include transparency, non-politicization and the promotion and protection of human rights, and that the Council President should embody these values.

The role of the Council President is to uphold the institutional integrity of the Council in its work, including by playing a key role in cases of [reprisals and intimidation](#). We reiterate that acts of intimidation and reprisals are the most flagrant types of non-cooperation. Any representatives of States that appear in the Secretary General's annual reports on reprisals, particularly those States which are repeat offenders, seeking the position of the Council's Presidency raises serious concerns.

The Council's President must uphold the minimum criteria set out in General Assembly *Resolution 60/251*, which requires that Members uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and cooperate fully and in good faith with the Council and its mechanisms. Thus, the Council President should have a demonstrated commitment to addressing reprisals and a history of supporting cooperation with Council mechanisms.

In this regard, ISHR has [prepared an objective comparison of all three candidates](#) to the Council's Presidency, based on OP9 of General Assembly *Resolution 60/251*. The score-card (in the annex to this letter) is intended to give a brief overview of each candidate's [adherence to Council membership standards](#): upholding the highest standards of promotion and protection of human rights, cooperation with the Council's mechanisms, their record on acts of intimidation and reprisal against those who cooperate with the UN in the field of human rights and pledges to strengthen and adhere to Council membership standards. ISHR acknowledges that data limitations and the need for objectivity mean that several of the criteria are concerned with form rather than substance.

We urge all members of the Council to elect the Council President based on the membership criteria as outlined above.

Sincerely,













1. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
2. Bahrain Institute for Rights and Democracy (BIRD)
3. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
4. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales
5. Child Rights Connect

Joint NGO open letter

6. CIVICUS
7. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)
8. Conectas Direitos Humanos
9. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide)
10. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
11. FIDH - International Federation for Human Rights
12. Human Rights Watch (HRW)
13. International Commission of Jurists
14. International Service for Human Rights
15. Save the Children
16. The Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC)

Annex

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL PRESIDENCY – 15th Cycle – 2021

Candidates Seeking Election	Bahrain	Fiji	Uzbekistan
			
<p>Highest standards in promotion and protection of human rights Ratified the 9 core international human rights treaties plus the related optional protocols</p>			
<p>Cooperation with Special Procedures Issued a standing invitation to Special Procedures</p>			
<p>Acts of intimidation and reprisals Zero cases of unresolved reprisals highlighted in the Secretary-General's annual reports (2010 – 2020)</p>			
<p>Strengthening the Human Rights Council's effectiveness Pledged to strengthen Human Rights Council membership and adherence to membership standards</p>	