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UN Human Rights Council elections: no room for double standards

The UN General Assembly should only elect member states to serve on the Human Rights Council that can demonstrate their commitment to human rights, Amnesty International said ahead of Monday's vote for 18 new Council members.

The elections will be held in the UN General Assembly in New York. Candidate countries include Ethiopia, Greece, Côte d'Ivoire, Pakistan and the United Arab Emirates, United States, and Venezuela.

Council members are expected to "uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights," but Amnesty International is concerned that some candidates fall short of this criteria.

"Some of the candidates commit gross human rights violations, have not ratified core human rights treaties and do not cooperate with the UN's human rights experts," said Amnesty International's representative to the UN in New York Jose Luis Dias.

Successful candidates require the support of the majority of the members of the General Assembly. However, just one of the five regional groups is set to have a genuinely open contest.

For the Western European and Others Group, in which Germany, Greece, Ireland, Sweden and the United States are candidates, there are three vacant seats. But the African, Asian, Eastern European, and Latin America and Caribbean Groups all have presented the same number of candidates as vacant seats.

Candidates in these groups are virtually guaranteed a seat on the Council without real choice for the members of the General Assembly.

In the past, no country has ever failed to gain the required 97 votes.

Voting Member States are supposed to take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights. "Electing states should return a blank ballot if they feel a candidate does not meet the high human rights standards expected of Council members," said Dias.

Amnesty International has written open letters to all candidates urging them to demonstrate their commitment to human rights in their election pledges.

For example, the organization is calling upon the Ethiopian government to issue clear instructions to the security services to end their harassment of local human rights defenders and to remove the barriers to the work of international human rights defenders and journalists in the country.

In the open letter to the United Arab Emirates, we highlight that, contrary to the government's commitment to support victims of domestic violence, the Supreme Court in 2010 upheld a husband's

right to 'discipline his wife and children, provided that this left no visible marks'.

Amnesty International is also calling upon candidates to cooperate fully with the human rights treaty monitoring bodies. Côte d'Ivoire, for example, has failed to deliver reports required by the Human Rights Committee, the Committee against Torture and the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights for more than 15 years.

"In order to be a member of the Human Rights Council, candidates should show the utmost commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, and we hope that they will seriously consider our recommendations," said Dias.