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UN Human Rights Council 2012 elections: An appeal for African leadership

African states have shown increasing readiness to engage the UN Human Rights Council in responding to human rights developments in Africa requiring the attention of the broader international community. Amnesty International urges African leaders meeting at the 19th Summit of the African Union to demonstrate the same leadership and set a positive example by ensuring contested elections to the Human Rights Council as required by the letter and spirit of the Council's founding resolution A/RES/60/251.

UN General Assembly members must have real choice to select those states that have the strongest demonstrated commitment to uphold human rights and to take effective action in the UN Human Rights Council to protect human rights. Amnesty International urges African Union member states to ensure that there will be more candidates from Africa than the vacant five seats available to it at the election of Council members scheduled for November 2012.

The practice of 'clean slates', where the number of candidates matches exactly the number vacancies, is inconsistent with the letter and spirit of resolution A/RES/60/251, which clearly contemplates contested elections for membership of the Council. The resolution calls for members of the Human Rights Council to be elected directly and individually by the majority of all of the members of the General Assembly taking into account the contribution by candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments. A clean slate leaves no electoral choice to the UN member states not involved in determining the slate and thereby frustrates their right of vote.

General Assembly resolution 60/251 stipulates that those states elected as members of the Human Rights Council must uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights. UN member states must be confident that they have been able to exercise their ballots in favour of states that have proved themselves capable of meeting that standard.

The spirit and letter of resolution 60/251 can only be satisfied if there are competitive elections in which UN member states are offered the possibility of choosing among candidates for the available seats on the Council.

Background

On Friday 13 July, the African Union 19th Summit is expected to consider five candidates for the five seats of the African Group open for election to UN Human Rights Council on 16 November 2012. The candidates that the African Group's permanent representatives in New York have reportedly recommended for endorsement are: Cote d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Gabon, Sierra Leone and Sudan.

Amnesty International has written to the members of all UN regional groups to encourage them to ensure that there are more candidates than the number of seats reserved to their group at the upcoming elections to the Human Rights Council and that candidates submit concrete, credible, and measurable pledges to promote and protect human rights at the national and international levels.

The UN General Assembly will elect 18 members to the Human Rights Council on 16 November 2012. For more information please visit <http://www.amnesty.org/en/united-nations/human-rights-council/human-rights-council-elections>.