

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

PUBLIC STATEMENT

AI Index: IOR 40/004/2009
08 April 2009

2009 Elections to the Human Rights Council: All candidates must demonstrate solid commitment to human rights

The effectiveness of the Human Rights Council, the UN's principal human rights body, in protecting and promoting human rights depends on the strength of the commitment of its members to base their contributions and decisions on human rights.

UN General Assembly resolution 60/251, establishing the Human Rights Council in 2006, requires that its members shall uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and fully cooperate with the Council.¹ The resolution also requires Council members to be elected directly and individually by secret ballot by the majority of the members of the General Assembly. When voting, member states shall take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their related voluntary pledges and commitments.² So central is the requirement for members to uphold human rights that the resolution further stipulates that Council members who commit gross and systematic violations of human rights can have their membership suspended by the General Assembly.³

This year's elections, in which 18 members are to be elected, are planned for 12 May 2009. A strong and effective Human Rights Council requires full respect for the above provisions in the forthcoming elections. In particular, all members of the General Assembly must have a real choice to select, in open and contested elections, as Council members states that show a genuine commitment to uphold human rights, including in their voluntary pledges.

Amnesty International urges all UN Member States:

- To ensure a wide range of candidates, more numerous than the seats that are vacant for each region. The practice of presenting 'clean slates', where the number of candidates matches exactly the number of seats available for the region, must be abandoned.
- To exclude vote-trading from these elections (the practice where countries are seeking support for their election in exchange for backing the requested state in other elections to UN bodies).
- To carefully consider each candidate's human rights record and commitment to human rights, including as expressed in their voluntary election pledges, and to vote only for those candidates that meet the high standards set out in resolution 60/251, even if, in some instances, this means leaving the ballot blank.

In order to give full effect to the requirements of General Assembly resolution 60/251, Amnesty International urges all countries considering candidacy in the forthcoming elections:

- To make concrete, credible and measurable pledges to promote and protect human rights at the national and international levels, taking into account the

¹ General Assembly resolution 60/251, operative paragraph 9

² Ibid, operative paragraphs 7 and 8

³ Ibid, operative paragraph 8

Suggested Elements for Voluntary Pledges and Commitments by Candidates for Election to the Human Rights Council, prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.⁴

- To commit, in their pledges, to ratifications of core human rights treaties and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, to the withdrawal of limiting reservations to such treaties and to full cooperation with the treaty monitoring bodies, including by submitting periodic reports on time and implementing the treaty body recommendations promptly and in full.
- To commit, in their pledges, to cooperate fully with the Human Rights Council's Special Procedures, including by responding promptly and substantively to their recommendations and by issuing a standing invitation to all Special Procedures.
- To commit to participate fully in the Universal Periodic Review, both as reviewed and reviewing country, to ensure that each review is focused on the improvement of the situation of human rights at the national level, and to the full and prompt implementation of the recommendations accepted during the Review.
- To declare their candidacy at least 30 days in advance of the elections planned for 12 May 2009.

Background

The Human Rights Council has 47 members. Based on equitable geographical distribution, it allocates seats to the regional groups as follows: African Group, 13 seats; Asian Group, 13 seats; Eastern European Group, 6 seats; Latin American and Caribbean Group, 8 seats; and Western and Others Group, 7 seats. To gain a seat on the Council for a three-year term, a state must achieve absolute majority support (97 votes) of the 192 members of the General Assembly. Members may seek immediate re-election once.

The terms of 18 members of the Human Rights Council come to an end on 19 June 2009: Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cameroon, Canada, China, Cuba, Djibouti, Germany, Jordan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Switzerland and Uruguay.

At the time of writing, the following countries are known to be candidates in the forthcoming elections:⁵

- o African Group (5 vacancies): **Cameroon, Djibouti**, Kenya, **Mauritius, Senegal**
- o Asian Group (5 vacancies): **Bangladesh, China, Jordan**, Kyrgyzstan, **Saudi Arabia**
- o Eastern European Group (2 vacancies): **Azerbaijan**, Hungary, **Russian Federation**
- o Latin American and Caribbean Group (3 vacancies): **Cuba, Mexico, Uruguay**
- o Western and Others Group (3 vacancies): Belgium, Norway, USA

Public Document

For more information please call Amnesty International's press office in London, UK, on +44 20 7413 5566 or email: press@amnesty.org

International Secretariat, Amnesty International, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 0DW, UK
www.amnesty.org

⁴ <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/pledges.pdf>

⁵ **Bold** font indicates that the state is seeking immediate re-election