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2007 ELECTIONS TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Respect for human rights must underpin the election process

This year's election of members of the Human Rights Council will take place on 17 May 2007. General Assembly resolution 60/251 establishing the Human Rights Council provides that Member States, when electing members of the Council, "shall take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments".¹

The resolution further establishes 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".² In casting their votes, Member States must satisfy themselves that candidates fully meet this requirement and elect a Council membership with demonstrated commitment to uphold human rights both internationally and nationally. The elections must provide all Member States a real opportunity to select candidates genuinely committed to protect and promote human rights. Amnesty International therefore encourages Member States in all regions to ensure that there are more candidates to contest the elections than there are vacant seats in each region.

In order to achieve greater openness and transparency around the elections to the Council and a healthier and more robust Council, Amnesty International calls on all candidate countries to:

- declare their candidacy 30 days in advance of elections on 17 May, i.e. by 17 April 2007 at the latest;
- make public human rights pledges that are concrete, credible and measurable. If candidates are seeking re-election, Amnesty International urges that they include in their renewed pledges information about steps they have taken to implement commitments made as candidates at last year's elections.

In formulating their pledges, Amnesty International encourages all candidate countries to include the following elements, bearing in mind the *Suggested Elements for Voluntary Pledges and Commitments by Candidates for Election to the Human Rights Council*³ prepared by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights:

1. Commitment to ensure an effective Human Rights Council, including by:
 - ensuring effective and timely responses to human rights violations, including human rights crises, wherever they occur;
 - supporting fully the system of independent expert Special Procedures of the Council;
 - contributing substantively to making the Universal Periodic Review mechanism effective and transparent;
 - supporting the widest possible opportunities for effective participation of non-governmental

organizations in the Council.

2. Commitment to ensure effective promotion and protection of human rights at home and abroad, including by:

cooperating fully with the Special Procedures of the Council, including by responding promptly and in full to their communications, implementing their recommendations, issuing a standing invitation and facilitating visits as requested;

ratifying and implementing all human rights treaties and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, removing any limiting reservations, and accepting individual communications, inquiry and inspection;

committing to cooperate fully with the treaty monitoring bodies, including by submitting periodic reports on time and promptly implementing their concluding observations and recommendations.

Finally, election on the basis of merit implies that 'vote trading' should be excluded. Amnesty International appeals to all Member States to cast their votes solely on the basis of a candidate country's human rights record and its commitment to contribute to the protection and promotion of human rights.

Background

General Assembly resolution 60/251 determined that the Human Rights Council shall consist of 47 members elected directly and individually by secret ballot by the majority of the members of the General Assembly. Based on equitable geographical distribution, it allocated 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, each member of the Council must achieve absolute majority support (97 votes) of the 191 members of the General Assembly. Members may seek immediate re-election once.

The terms of 14 members of the Council end in 2007:

African Group: Algeria, Morocco, South Africa, Tunisia

Asian Group: Bahrain, India, Indonesia, Philippines

Eastern European Group: Czech Republic, Poland

Latin American and Caribbean Group: Argentina, Ecuador

Western and Others Group: Finland, Netherlands

A list of candidates and some of their pledges for this year's elections is available on the UN's website: <http://www.un.org/ga/61/elect/hrc/#members>

¹ OP 8

² OP 9

³ The *Suggested Elements for Voluntary Pledges and Commitments by Candidates for Election to the Human Rights Council* can be accessed at: <http://www.ohchr.org/english/13042006.pdf>