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2008 ELECTIONS TO THE UN HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Prospective members of the Human Rights Council must demonstrate solid commitment to human rights

The actions of the UN's principal human rights political body to promote and protect human rights ultimately depend on the willingness of its members to put human rights first. A Council membership that is genuinely committed to human rights is therefore an essential prerequisite for an effective Human Rights Council and for fulfilling the requirements of General Assembly resolution 60/251.

That resolution requires that members elected to the Council "uphold the highest standards in the promotion and protection of human rights and fully cooperate with the Council", and that Member States, when electing members of the Council, "take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and protection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments".

On 21 May 2008 the General Assembly will elect, in direct and individual elections and by secret ballot, 15 member states to serve a three-year term on the Council. In casting their votes, Member States must satisfy themselves that the states they support have demonstrated a commitment to uphold human rights both internationally and nationally and to fully cooperate with the Council and its Special Procedures.

In order to deliver the strong and effective Human Rights Council envisaged by resolution 60/251 Amnesty International makes the following recommendations to all Member States:

- Each geographical region must field more candidates to contest the elections than there are vacant seats for that region. This will provide Member States with a real choice in selecting those candidates that are genuinely committed to protect and promote human rights;
- Candidate countries should declare their candidacy at least 30 days in advance of elections on 21 May, in the interest of openness and transparency of the elections;
- In line with established practice, all candidate countries should make public human rights pledges that are concrete, credible and measurable. In formulating their pledges, candidate countries should consider the *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. Countries that are seeking re-election should include in their renewed pledges information about steps they have taken to implement earlier commitments;
- In their pledges, candidate countries should elaborate how they will ensure effective and timely responses to human rights violations, including human rights crises, wherever they occur;

- Candidate countries should also commit to cooperate with the Council and its mechanisms, including by:
 - Supporting the system of Special Procedures, including by ensuring that the nomination process of mandate holders is transparent and based on the agreed criteria of expertise, experience, independence and impartiality;
 - Responding promptly and in full to Special Procedures' communications, implementing their recommendations, issuing a standing invitation and facilitating visits as requested;
 - Ensuring the integration of the human rights of women and a gender perspective in the work of the Council and its mechanisms, including the Special Procedures, the Universal Periodic Review and the Advisory Committee;
 - Participating fully in the Universal Periodic Review, both as reviewed and reviewing state, and ensuring that it is carried out in a transparent manner and results in concrete measures to enhance the situation of human rights in the countries reviewed;
 - Supporting the effective participation of non-governmental organizations in all aspects of the Council's work;
- Candidate countries should outline a timetable for ratifying and implementing any outstanding international human rights treaties; removing limiting reservations; accepting individual communications and inquiry; submitting overdue periodic reports to the treaty monitoring bodies; and implementing their concluding observations, recommendations and views promptly and in full;
- Member States should vote only for those candidates that have demonstrated, in their pledges and through actions at the national and international levels, their genuine commitment to upholding the highest human rights standards.

Background

The terms of 15 members of the Human Rights Council come to an end in June 2008:

- African Group: Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Zambia
- Asian Group: Japan, Pakistan, Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka
- Eastern European Group: Romania, Ukraine
- Latin American and Caribbean Group: Brazil, Guatemala, Peru
- Western and Others Group: France, UK

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, each member of the Council must achieve absolute majority support (97 votes) of the 192 members of the General Assembly. Members may seek immediate re-election once.

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