



## Briefing Note: **U.N. HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL**

The **Human Rights Council** (HRC or Council) is the only intergovernmental organisation **responding to all human rights abuses across the globe** by exposing violators and demanding change.

By sounding alarm bells at an early stage, the **HRC can prevent oncoming human rights disasters or protracted crises from spreading**. Its actions have far-reaching effects in communities tackling issues such as terrorism, climate change, racism and discrimination, LGBT rights, torture, poverty, the rights of older and disabled persons, migration, freedom of speech and peaceful demonstrations, democracy, and others.

**No one State runs the Council.** The HRC is a group of 47 nations presided over by a President, a position currently held by the Ambassador of the Czech Republic to the UN Office at Geneva, Václav Bálek. With 123 of the 193 UN member States having served on the HRC, the Council's membership reflects the UN's diversity giving it legitimacy when speaking out on human rights violations in all countries.

The **HRC can address any human rights issue brought to its attention**, often those that other bodies will not or are unable to discuss. Governments, grass roots activists and other HRC participants address countless issues throughout the busy Council sessions year-long; more than 30 weeks of meetings annually.

The HRC has adopted **1,585 resolutions** since it began meeting in 2006, addressing no fewer than **120 themes**, and some **36 country situations** placing those governments under intense scrutiny. Nearly one-third of these resolutions, **457, have focussed on country situations**; roughly 80% of all resolutions have been adopted by consensus.

The Council has held **35 emergency sessions** addressing human rights violations in several countries. These "special sessions" were held on Libya and Syria, in the wake of the "Arab Spring", and more recently to address situations in Myanmar, the occupied Palestinian territory, Sudan, Ethiopia, Ukraine and Iran, to sharply criticize atrocities committed. Such action by the Council also proved it is well poised to respond to crises whenever they occur.

The Council has also authorised **37 commissions of inquiry and fact-finding missions** producing **hard-hitting evidence on war crimes** and crimes against humanity feeding into formal justice processes to hold violators accountable. Such investigations have been carried out on the occupied Palestinian territory, Darfur, Libya, Côte d'Ivoire, Syria, North Korea, the Central African Republic, Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Iraq, South Sudan, Burundi, Myanmar, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen, Venezuela, Ethiopia and Ukraine.

The Council's **Universal Periodic Review has been shining a light on human rights abuses worldwide** since it began in 2008. All 193 UN member States have had their human rights records fully reviewed three times, sparking real change on the ground with new human rights laws and practices, better protection for victims, improved access to social services, etc.

The HRC's **independent human rights experts** ("Special Procedures") serve as the **eyes and ears of the Council** by monitoring human rights in countries pushing for improved conditions. These experts – now numbering 80 mandate holders for 59 mandates – speak out on themes such as education, health, free speech and human trafficking, as well as on country situations including North Korea, Iran and Myanmar, among others. **In 2022 (to date), they carried out 66 visits to 54 countries.**

*\*More information about HRC available here: <http://www.ohchr.org/hrc> 12/01/23*