



## HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

### Introduction

The Human Rights Council (HRC) is the main United Nations intergovernmental body responsible for human rights. Established in 2006, it replaces the former Commission on Human Rights.

The general mandate of the HRC includes addressing situations of human rights violations; the adoption of recommendations; the effective coordination and mainstreaming of human rights within the UN system and the promotion of human rights education and training. The Council is notably in charge of both thematic and geographical Special Procedures (Special Rapporteurs, Independent Experts and Working Groups), as well as the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). Specific fact sheets on these mechanisms are available.

### How does the HRC work ?

#### 1) Membership



The HRC has 47 Member States elected by a majority of the members of the General Assembly with equitable geographical representation (13 from Africa, 13 from Asia, 8 from South America and the Caribbean, 7 from Western European and other States and 6 from Eastern European States). The term of office of its members is 3 years, renewable once consecutively. After 6 years, a state must wait one year before running again.

During the elections, the general human rights record of the candidate States must in principle be taken into consideration. At the same time, candidate States are required to make voluntary human rights commitments and pledges, which are made public.

If a member state commits gross and systematic human rights violations, the UN General Assembly may decide, by a two-thirds majority, to suspend its membership in the Council.

#### 2) Sessions

The Council holds three regular sessions a year: in March (for 4 weeks), June (for 3 weeks) and September (for 3 weeks). It can also hold special sessions to deal with human rights violations and urgent matters, at the request of one third of the Member States, and thus react more quickly to crisis situations.

The regular sessions of the Council are organised around 10 agenda items.

1. Organizational and procedural matters ;
2. Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General ;
3. Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development ;
4. Human rights situations that require the Council's attention ;
5. Human rights bodies and mechanisms ;
6. Universal Periodic Review ;
7. Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories ;
8. Follow-up and implementation of the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action 1;

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1. Aiming at strengthening human rights work around the world, strengthening and harmonising the monitoring capacity of the UN system and calling for the establishment of a High Commissioner for Human Rights

9. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance, follow-up and implementation of the Durban Declaration and Programme of Action ;

10. Technical assistance and capacity-building.

At its sessions, the Council adopts, among other things, the final reports of the UPR and examines the annual reports of the Special Procedures. Several country situations of particular concern are also discussed. Finally, resolutions are adopted to renew the mandates of the Special Procedures or other mechanisms attached to the Council or to pay particular attention to a specific theme or geographical area.

## Opportunities for action by FIACAT and the ACATs

As an NGO in consultative status with ECOSOC, FIACAT has several means of action before the Human Rights Council.

### 1) Attending the Council's sessions



FIACAT can accredit representatives (including ACAT members and members of partner INGOs) to attend the Council sessions in Geneva.

Sessions can also be followed [live](#) or via [webcast \(https://media.un.org/en/webtv\)](https://media.un.org/en/webtv)

### 2) Submitting written statements



Written statements are communications from FIACAT or in coalition with other NGOs, addressed in advance of the HRC session on issues relevant to its work. Submissions from NGOs in general consultative status with ECOSOC, such as FIACAT, should not exceed 2000 words. Once submitted, they become part of the official documents of the Council session. They provide an opportunity for FIACAT and the ACATs to share their expertise and field experience.

### 3) Delivering oral statements



FIACAT, sometimes jointly with ACATs when appropriate, may make oral interventions on all substantive issues, both in the general debates (1 min 30 max), in the interactive dialogues in particular with the Special Procedures experts (1 min 30 except for the UPR 2 min max) and in the panels, which take place during the Council sessions in order to relay their concerns. When presenting concerns, it is advisable to refer to the points made by the different mechanisms addressed and to conclude with one or more questions or recommendations addressed to the experts, the Council or the States.

### 4) Organising and participating in side events



Side events allow NGOs in consultative status, such as FIACAT, or States themselves, to organise events in the margins of the HRC plenary session and in relation to its work. These events, thematic or geographical, combining expert interventions, exchanges and free debates, allow NGOs to better transmit their experience and to interact with the other actors of the Council such as States, other NGOs, special rapporteurs or other UN experts. Other actors, such as NGOs without consultative status with ECOSOC, may be invited to take part or attend these events. When a country-specific event is organised, it is advisable, where possible, to invite the state concerned to take part in it.

### 5) Advocacy around resolutions



In parallel to the Council's plenary sessions, States hold informal consultations on the resolutions that are presented at the session. During these consultations, States discuss the proposed resolutions paragraph by paragraph.

While NGOs cannot speak and amend resolutions during the session, it is often possible for them to discuss them with States during these informal consultations, in order to try to influence their position and the content of the resolution. This advocacy can also take place informally during bilateral meetings, at the initiative of NGOs or sometimes even States, on the margins of the Council with representatives of diplomatic missions.

### Find out more

- [Presentation of the Human Rights Council - OHCHR Handbook for Civil Society - https://tinyurl.com/2p8hm67h](https://tinyurl.com/2p8hm67h)
- [NGO Participation in the Council - https://tinyurl.com/2p9fx8ay](https://tinyurl.com/2p9fx8ay)

