



## 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**. Prompt action by the Council has helped stem conflicts in countries given international condemnation voiced at the HRC and critical reporting from the Council-mandated investigation missions. The HRC's swift actions to spotlight human rights violations has also stirred global attention and prompted the governments to take actions to remedy those situations.

**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 El Salvador (Joaquín A. Maza Martelli). With 103 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.

**Council members commit themselves to uphold human rights.** No country has a clean human rights sheet, and the quality of the Council's membership influences its impacts.

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; approx. 30 weeks of meetings annually.

The HRC has adopted over **1,350 resolutions** since it began meeting in 2006, addressing no fewer than **120 themes**, and some **30 country situations** placing those governments under intense scrutiny. The themes addressed by the Council include rule of law, democracy, terrorism, human

trafficking, torture, freedoms of opinion, expression, assembly and association, women's rights and gender equality, migration, persons with disabilities, and LGBT rights. Nearly half of these resolutions, **633, have focussed on country situations**; 80% of all resolutions have been adopted by consensus.

The Council has held **26 emergency sessions** addressing human rights violations in several countries. In the wake of the "Arab Spring" in late 2010, such meetings were held on Libya and Syria to sharply criticize atrocities committed, as well as the Central African Republic, Iraq (addressing ISIL), Gaza, Boko Haram, Burundi, and South Sudan.

The Council has also authorised **23 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. Since 2011, such investigations have been carried out on Libya, Côte d'Ivoire, Syria, North Korea, the Central African Republic, Sri Lanka, Eritrea, Gaza, Iraq, South Sudan and Burundi.

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 twice, sparking real change on the ground with new human rights laws and practices, better protection for victims, strengthened rule of law and justice systems, and accountability for abuses.

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 57 mandates – speak out on themes such as education, health, free speech and human trafficking, as well as on country situations including North Korea, Eritrea, Iran and Myanmar, among others. **In 2016, they carried out 96 visits to 65 countries**, and have had major impacts in reducing human rights violations.

*\*More information about HRC available here: <http://www.ohchr.org/hrc> 10/02/17*