



About the Human Rights Council

What is it?

The Human Rights Council is the principal United Nations intergovernmental body responsible for human rights. Established by General Assembly resolution 60/251, it replaced and assumed most mandates, mechanisms, functions and responsibilities previously entrusted to the Commission on Human Rights. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) is the secretariat for the Human Rights Council, as it was for the Commission on Human Rights.

How does it work?

The Human Rights Council is an intergovernmental body of 47 member States based in Geneva. It meets for at least 10 weeks a year spread over no fewer than three sessions, and can also hold special sessions. While the Commission was a subsidiary organ of the **Economic and Social Council** (ECOSOC), the Human Rights Council is a subsidiary organ of the **General Assembly**. Its role includes addressing violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and the promotion of effective coordination and the mainstreaming of human rights within the United Nations system.

On 18 June 2007, one year after its first meeting, the Human Rights Council agreed on a package that established the procedures, mechanisms and structures to form the basis for its future work. This package, adopted as its **resolution 5/1**, included the Council's agenda, programme of work and rules of procedure and made modifications to the system of expert advice and the complaint procedure inherited from the Commission. Resolution 5/1 also set out the modalities for the operation of the Council's new universal periodic review mechanism and established a process for reviewing, rationalizing and improving all special procedures mandates.

How to access and work with the Human Rights Council and its mandates and mechanisms.

In resolution 60/251 the General Assembly acknowledged the important role played by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other civil society actors nationally, regionally and internationally in the promotion and protection of human rights. The participation of observers, including NGOs, in the sessions of the Council is based on arrangements and practices observed by the former Commission. These practices and arrangements continue to develop and evolve, with the Council required to ensure "the most effective contribution" of observers.

While **consultative status** with ECOSOC is required for NGOs to be accredited as observers to the Human Rights Council's sessions, NGOs without such status and other civil society actors can contribute to the overall work of the Human Rights Council and its mechanisms in a number of ways.

Furthermore, its meetings are broadcast live on an OHCHR **webcast**, and a broad range of documentation and information is available on the Council's **homepage** and **Extranet**. Session-specific information is normally posted on the homepage two weeks before each regular session.

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