

[HRC2020 | Blueprint for States to ensure that the UN Human Rights Council continues to be credible, accessible and effective](#)

24.01.2020



In 2019, Council members led on a number of country situations, including holding fellow Council members accountable. For example, Iceland and Australia delivered two joint statements on **Saudi Arabia**, the UK delivered joint statements on **Cameroon** and **Chechnya** among others, the Lima group presented resolutions on **Venezuela** and **Nicaragua**, Iceland presented a resolution on the **Philippines**, and Council members led and renewed the mandates on several country situations.^u

We expect Council members to continue to stand with rights holders and victims of human rights violations, wherever they occur, including by stepping up their efforts to ensure that no State is above scrutiny.

Confronted with mounting evidence of serious human rights violations in **China**, specifically the mass internment, 're-education', surveillance and harassment of Turkic Muslims in the western province of Xinjiang, the view of many parts of the UN is incontrovertible. Beginning with a major [UN review](#) in August 2018, the UN High Commissioner has pressed for access, while the Special Procedures have expressed serious concerns about protection of [freedom of religious belief](#), the impacts of [counter-terrorism](#) and counter-extremism measures, and the imposition of [the death penalty](#) in at least one case, that of university president Tashpolat Tiyp. In light of these concerns and the continued deterioration of the situation for human rights [lawyers](#) and [defenders](#); the attacks on cultural rights and other freedoms in Tibet; and criminalisation of peaceful assembly and excessive use of police force in [Hong Kong](#), it is high time for the Council to act. Member States should take concrete steps to call for independent, expert monitoring and reporting on the situation in Xinjiang, including access to the region, and urge accountability for actions by public authorities.

The lack of action by the international community has emboldened the **Egyptian** government to continue to violate fundamental rights of its citizens. Special Procedures have rung the alarm bell regarding the pattern of reprisals against individuals and groups who sought to or engaged with the UN. In the last quarter of 2019 alone, more than 3,000 people were arbitrarily arrested and [prosecuted](#) under counter-terrorism laws in a nationwide crackdown against all forms of peaceful expression. The Committee against Torture has [found](#) that torture in Egypt is widespread and systematic. States should initiate Council action on the situation before it further deteriorates.

The Council's action on **Saudi Arabia** has contributed to the provisional [release](#) of at least seven women's rights activists from detention. However, they are still facing trial and many [remain](#) in detention. Further, the June session will mark one year since the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial killing presented her report to the Council which found the State of Saudi Arabia responsible for the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Recent [revelations](#) of phone hacking, surveillance and possible blackmail and extortion of the owner of the Washington Post demonstrate the measures that the State is prepared to take to silence any form of criticism of dissent. States should ensure that Council scrutiny is maintained and in particular establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism over the situation.

The OHCHR has [documented](#) violations by security forces and abuses by armed groups in [both](#) Indian-administered Kashmir and Pakistan-administered Kashmir since June 2016. The government of India has since [imposed](#) severe restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of movement, and freedom of peaceful assembly. Council members and observer States should heed the concerns of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Special Procedures, and civil society by supporting a resolution that establishes an independent international investigation into allegations of human rights violations in **Kashmir**.

The High Commissioner also expressed concern over **India's** Citizenship (Amendment) Act 2019 (CAA) for being '[fundamentally discriminatory](#)' as it fails to extend protections to Muslim asylum seekers. Nationwide demonstrations and protests have been met with police brutality and arbitrary detentions. Vigilante groups allegedly affiliated with right-wing Hindu nationalist groups close to the government have physically attacked student protestors. Human rights defenders involved in organising peaceful assemblies have been detained and faced online harassment. ISHR calls on States to raise these concerns in their national statements including during the high level segment.

2020 will mark the 20th [anniversary](#) of the creation of the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of **human rights defenders**, to be renewed at the March session. The mandate is integral to the global recognition and protection of defenders. ISHR calls on States from all regions to fully support the mandate by presenting early co-sponsorship of the resolution.

Widespread and systematic attacks against human rights defenders are often early warning signs of an imminent human rights emergency. States should consider this alarm bell in a timely manner and effectively use the **Council's prevention mandate** before the situation deteriorates.

The [rights-based criteria](#), which over 60 States from all regions have committed to applying on whether a situation merits the Council's attention, includes several criteria relating to the situation of human rights defenders and cooperation with the Council, its mechanisms, OHCHR and treaty bodies. Acts of intimidation and reprisals are the most flagrant type of non-cooperation. States should continue to demonstrate leadership, principled action and sustained follow through when the **objective criteria** are met.

Given the global surge of protest around the world in recent months and the disproportionate force used by many States in response, States leading the biannual resolutions on **peaceful protests and civil society space** should use the March session to deliver joint statements raising collective concern over country situations where there have been grave violations of the previous resolutions over the past two years. States should rely on the objective criteria to determine the selection of those situations such as statements by the High Commissioner and the Special Procedures. By doing so, States would contribute to strengthening the implementation of thematic resolutions as well as inform their national priorities through objective human rights analysis.

For the Council to continue to be effective, it must continue to be accessible to rights holders and victims. Those who defend human rights must be able to access the UN and the Council freely and safely. They should not be intimidated nor suffer **reprisals** for collaborating with the UN. As the new Assistant Secretary General Ilze Brands Kehris starts her term, we call on all States to fully cooperate with her mandate and support her efforts to develop and implement a UN system wide policy to end reprisals. At every Council session, States should raise individual cases, demand an immediate end to all acts of intimidation and reprisals and remedy to victims.

The adopted **efficiency measures** for 2020 should be evaluated in terms of the Council's accessibility and effectiveness, rather than an evaluation based solely on financial analysis. ISHR reiterates that the removal of general debates in June will have a disproportionate and negative impact on civil society participation, and in particular on women human rights defenders and those working to combat violence and discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity.

Finally, ISHR urges all regional groups to present competitive slates for **Council elections**. States should follow and deepen the practice of announcing their candidacies by the High-Level Segment of every year's March session of the Council, at the latest. The lack of competition all but guarantees election for all the candidates in a closed slate, irrespective of their human rights performance. This turns the election into an appointment process that violates the spirit of the Council's membership rules and undermines the credibility and effectiveness of the Council. Further, in announcing and publishing candidate States' voluntary pledges in a timely manner, they encourage engagement and ownership by other actors to follow up on, and contribute to, their implementation, with the [ultimate goal](#) of improving the human rights situation on the ground.

Photo: UN, Jean-Marc Ferre

¹⁴ See here for [HRC40](#), [HRC41](#) and [HRC42](#).

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