

Joint Civil Society Letter to UN Member States: Appointment of the next UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

28 July 2022

Your Excellency,

The post of High Commissioner for Human Rights is critical to the promotion and protection of human rights globally, particularly at a time when human rights standards and mechanisms face enormous pressure from powerful governments, and human rights communities in countries throughout the world face imminent threats to their survival. **In this context, we write to you to urge your government to actively engage with the Office of the UN Secretary-General in order to: (1) Voice your support for the appointment of a High Commissioner who will be a credible, impartial and courageous champion of human rights around the world, and (2) Advocate for an open, transparent and merit-based process for their selection, which would allow for the meaningful involvement of civil society.**

The post of High Commissioner should be filled by someone of high moral standing and personal integrity, and who is independent and impartial with competency and expertise in the field of human rights. It requires a human rights champion who is courageous and principled. The nominee should have a proven record of effective public advocacy, as well as demonstrated experience working with human rights defenders and victims of violations. The post requires a strong commitment to addressing discrimination, inequality, oppression and injustice in all its forms, as well as combating impunity and pursuing redress and accountability for all human rights violations and abuses, including those committed by the most powerful governments.

The High Commissioner's role is to be the world's leading human rights advocate, as distinct from the role of a diplomat or political envoy. Demonstrating solidarity with victims, publicly calling out abuses and mobilizing protection efforts for human rights defenders and communities under threat should take precedence over a "friendly dialogue" or "political negotiations" with governments. The creation of the position of High Commissioner was, in part, an initiative first led by global civil society in response to the need within the international system for a strong, principled, outspoken and visible advocate for human rights, and unwavering defender of victims of human rights violations and abuses.

The process of nominating the next High Commissioner is critical to identifying the most qualified candidate and ensuring the credibility of their appointment. This process should be open, transparent and merit-based. It should involve wide and meaningful consultation with independent human rights organisations and human rights defenders from around the world. **Given that High Commissioner Bachelet's mandate will end on 31 August 2022, it is imperative that this process move quickly.**

Human rights are primary values, legal obligations, and indispensable for peace, security and sustainable development. It is vital that the next High Commissioner be a compelling leader for human rights within the UN system and throughout the world. In addition to advocating for an outstanding candidate through a consultative process, we urge you to vigorously defend the independence of the Office of the High Commissioner, including through adequate resourcing. For our part, we pledge to support the High Commissioner and the Office of the High Commissioner in their principled and good faith efforts to promote and protect human rights worldwide.

We look forward to your response.

Yours faithfully,

African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights (ACDHRS)
Amnesty International
Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
CIVICUS
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
Conectas Human Rights
Franciscans International
Front Line Defenders
Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect
Gulf Centre for Human Rights (GCHR)
Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights
Human Rights House Foundation
Human Rights Law Centre
Human Rights Watch (HRW)
International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
Lawyers' Rights Watch Canada
West African Human Rights Defenders Network (ROADDH/WAHRDN)
World Organization Against Torture (OMCT)
World Uyghur Congress (WUC)
Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights