

To the President of the Human Rights Council

His Excellency Mr Sidharto Reza SURYODIPURO

With copy to:

Vice-Presidents of the Human Rights Council

His Excellency Mr Tsegab Kebebew DAKA (Ethiopia)

Her Excellency Mrs Riia SALSA-AUDIFFREN (Estonia)

His Excellency Mr Marcelo VÁZQUEZ BERMÚDEZ (Ecuador)

His Excellency Mr Marcos GÓMEZ MARTÍNEZ (Spain)

Re: Ensuring Safe, Meaningful and Inclusive Civil Society Participation in the 20th Year of the Human Rights Council

Geneva 23 February, 2026

Your Excellency,

We, the undersigned human rights organisations, extend our congratulations on your election to lead the Human Rights Council (HRC) in its 20th cycle. We also take this opportunity to congratulate and welcome the Vice-Presidents of the Council and look forward to engaging constructively with you throughout the year.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the Council, a significant milestone amid budgetary constraints, discussions of institutional reform, and growing global instability and challenges to multilateralism. This anniversary offers an opportunity not only to reflect on achievements, but also to reaffirm the Council's founding vision: *a body that is accessible, responsive, and grounded in the lived realities of rights holders.*

Meaningful civil society participation and engagement

Civil society participation remains a cornerstone of the Council's legitimacy and effectiveness. Civil society organisations and human rights defenders provide essential first-hand perspectives from communities on the ground. Their expertise and lived experience strengthen the relevance and impact of the Council's debates, resolutions, and mechanisms. For many operating in highly restrictive environments, engagement with the Council and its mechanisms is a vital lifeline, often the only international avenue for visibility, solidarity and protection.

However, barriers to safe and meaningful participation are increasing. These include visa denials and administrative delays, budgetary constraints, funding cuts, rising travel costs, and mounting security concerns, including intimidation and threats of reprisals. These challenges unfold against a broader context of shrinking civic space and democratic backsliding across all regions. If left unaddressed, such obstacles risk undermining the Council's credibility, inclusiveness, and effectiveness.

The Council has historically demonstrated leadership within the UN system in protecting the space for participation. In line with General Assembly resolution 60/251, it should continue to strive to guarantee the most effective contribution of all stakeholders, including civil society organisations.

In previous years, Human Rights Council Presidents have served as a focal point within the Bureau for engagement with civil society. Predictable, transparent, and open channels of communication are particularly critical, especially during institutional reform and financial constraints.

Remote participation and hybrid modalities

Remote and hybrid participation has long been a priority for Council stakeholders, including civil society. The Council's [decision in 2024](#) to recognise remote participation as a means to make its proceedings more accessible, alongside in-person participation, marks an important step forward. However, discussions at the General Assembly level appear to have stalled. We urge you to engage proactively with Member States to ensure that informal consultations and negotiations are consistently made available through hybrid modalities, and to use your mandate to support the institutionalisation of hybrid participation as standard practice within the Council's work.

Efficiency process

We recognise the long-standing demand to improve the HRC's working methods and efficiency amid growing budgetary and time constraints. Nonetheless, as we said time and again, efficiency must not come at the expense of effectiveness, expertise, inclusiveness, or participation. Any reform efforts should build on previous exercises and lessons learned, rather than restarting from scratch, and must remain attentive to the practical constraints faced by organisations engaging with the Council.

Appointment of Special Procedures

We also emphasise the critical role of the President in the appointment of Special Procedures mandate holders. The credibility and effectiveness of the Special Procedures system depend on the independence, expertise, integrity, and demonstrated commitment to human rights and civil society contributions. We encourage you to explore avenues for meaningful civil society engagement in the appointment process, with a view to enhancing transparency and accessibility.

Acts of intimidation and reprisals

The President's role in addressing reprisals against those who engage with the Council is equally vital. Strong and visible leadership is essential to safeguard participation. We encourage you to ensure active follow-up on allegations of reprisals, maintain a publicly accessible and regularly updated register of cases, and present summaries at each session. Where a State's response is insufficient, cases should be formally brought to the Council's attention for further consideration.

We are deeply concerned by reports of attacks, threats, intimidation, and disinformation campaigns directed at mandate holders in connection with the essential responsibilities entrusted to them by the

Council. Such actions undermine not only the individuals concerned but also the integrity and effectiveness of the Council's work.

In this regard, the President has a critical role to play in calling on all UN Member States to cooperate fully and constructively with the Special Rapporteurs and other mandate holders of the Council. Disagreement and criticism of the work of the Special Procedures must be fact-based and should be expressed in a constructive and respectful manner. Your office plays a key role in ensuring that they are able to carry out their functions independently and without fear of acts of intimidation or reprisal.

Recommendations and requests

As observers of the Council, consistent with its founding resolutions, established UN practice, and United Nations Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31, we respectfully call on you to:

- Serve as civil society's focal point with the HRC Bureau;
- Conduct Regular briefings or updates for civil society and transparent information-sharing on:
 - The 2021-2026 review of the status of the Council
 - The ongoing efficiency exercise
 - The impact of budget cuts and the UN liquidity crisis
 - Any other measures that affect civil society access and participation
- Prioritise and actively promote remote participation and hybrid modalities in your engagement with the President of the General Assembly, with a view to institutionalising hybrid engagement as standard HRC practice;
- Conduct a data-based impact assessment of measures adopted under the efficiency exercise, evaluating their practical consequences, including their impact on civil society participation and any unintended negative effects;
- Strengthen transparency and opportunities for civil society engagement in the appointment of new mandate holders;
- Speak out in the strongest terms in support of the independence of the expert mandates of the Council and against personal attacks against mandate holders.

The 20th anniversary of the Council offers a renewed opportunity to reaffirm its founding promise: a Human Rights Council that is accessible, inclusive, and responds to the needs of those who need it the most. We stand ready to work collaboratively with you and the Bureau to ensure that this promise is realised in practice.

Please accept, Your Excellency, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Sincerely,

Undersigned organisations:

1. International Service for Human Rights
2. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture victims (IRCT)
3. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
4. World Organisation Against Torture
5. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
6. Women Deliver
7. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
8. Geneva for Human Rights - Global Training & Policy Studies
9. Privacy International
10. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)
11. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
12. Privacy International
13. Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples (MRAP)
14. American Association of Jurists (AAJ)
15. ARTICLE 19
16. Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative (CHRI)
17. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
18. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS)
19. Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights
20. West African Human Rights Defenders Network
21. Peace Brigades International
22. ILGA World
23. Human Rights Watch
24. Amnesty International
25. Justiça Global
26. Center for Reproductive Rights
27. FIAN International
28. Gulf Centre for Human Rights
29. Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)