

To the President of the General Assembly

H.E. Ms Annalena Baerbock

To the co-facilitators of the process to consider the status of the Human Rights Council

H.E. Ambassador Fergal Mythen, Permanent Representative of Ireland to the United Nations

H.E. Ambassador Coly Seck, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Senegal to the United Nations

To the President of the Human Rights Council

H.E. Excellency Mr Sidharto Reza Suryodipuro

To the Focal Points for the General Assembly status review process in Geneva

H.E. Ambassador Usana Berananda, Permanent Representative of Thailand to the United Nations in Geneva

H.E. Ambassador Marcos Gómez Martínez, Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations in Geneva

Geneva, 17 March 2026

Subject: Civil society views on the 2026 review of the status of the United Nations Human Rights Council

Excellencies,

In 2006, through United Nations General Assembly Resolution 60/251, the United Nations General Assembly established the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) and mandated a review of its work and status within five years. The General Assembly subsequently addressed the review process through United Nations General Assembly Resolution 65/281 and postponed the issue of the status to no later than 15 years after the initial review.

June 2026 marks the deadline for the General Assembly to review the Council's status. On 12 February 2026, the President of the General Assembly appointed Ireland and Senegal as co-facilitators to lead consultations on whether the Council should maintain its status as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly.

As civil society organisations committed to the promotion and protection of human rights, we write to share our views on this upcoming review.

Elevation of Status

As a matter of principle, **the General Assembly should work towards elevating the Council's status as a standing body and facilitating its effective engagement with other UN organs.** States should express their commitment to working toward this outcome, whether in the context of the current review or any future status review.

Elevating the Human Rights Council to the status of a principal UN organ would affirm that human rights stand on an **equal institutional footing with peace and security and development.** It would also bring greater architectural clarity to the UN system by aligning global human rights governance with existing Councils responsible for security and development. Such elevation could **strengthen the political weight of Human Rights Council resolutions, recommendations, and reporting.** It could also improve follow-up to Council decisions, help prioritise funding, and reinforce the interdependence of the UN's three pillars. In addition, elevating the Council's status could **strengthen its institutional autonomy and reduce risks of political interference.**

However, such a change would require amendment of the Charter of the United Nations under Article 108. Given the current geopolitical context, the elevation of the Council to principal organ status by June 2026 appears unlikely.

Risks of an Overly Broad Review

Resolution 65/281 does not mandate a comprehensive review of the Council's functioning and its Institutional Building Package. The signatories of this letter **support a review limited to the question of whether to maintain the status of the Human Rights Council as a subsidiary body of the General Assembly.** At a minimum, **States must ensure that the current review does not weaken in any way the Council's status, mandate, or work.**

Expanding the scope of the review beyond this question would carry significant risks. In particular, it could:

- Limit the meaningful participation of civil society in the Council's work;
- Weaken the Council's protection mandate;
- Curtail the independence of the Council's Special Procedures;
- Reduce the Council's ability to address country situations;
- Undermine the effectiveness and accessibility of the Council, particularly in a context of constrained resources; and
- Divert the Council's limited attention and resources away from dealing with multiple human rights conflicts and crises at a critical time.

We would like to emphasise that proposals to revise and rationalise Special Procedures, alter mandate selection processes, or integrate mandates into investigative mechanisms fall outside the mandate of the status review and should not be addressed through the General Assembly's current review process.

Additional Options to Strengthen the Council

If the General Assembly decides to maintain the Council's status as a subsidiary body, it should, in line with past precedent, consider again the question of whether to elevate this status at an appropriate moment, no sooner than ten years and no later than fifteen years from now. In such a case, States should also consider other ways to strengthen the standing of the Council within the UN system. In this regard, the General Assembly could explore the following options:

- Mandating the Council to formally **bring to the attention of the United Nations Security Council human rights issues and situations** that relate to the maintenance of international peace and security, thereby contributing to prevention and accountability.
- Mandating the Council to **report directly to the plenary of the General Assembly** rather than through the Third Committee, thereby improving efficiency and reducing duplication.
- Authorising the Council to **seek advisory opinions from the International Court of Justice on legal questions** arising within the scope of its activities, thereby promoting the consistent and principled development and application of international human rights law.

Recommendations to the Co-Facilitators

We encourage the co-facilitators to:

- Reaffirm that the present review is **limited to the question of the Council's status as a subsidiary body** and whether it should be elevated to a primary organ of the UN;
- Work in close collaboration with the President of the Human Rights Council to **reiterate the importance of the Council's contribution to the review of its status**; and
- Establish a **clear, timely, and transparent consultation process involving all stakeholders**, including civil society organisations. This process should include defined timelines, clear expected outcomes, and options for remote access and participation.

The 2026 review provides an important opportunity for Member States to reaffirm the central role of the Human Rights Council in the UN system. **This process should remain focused on the Council's institutional status and should not be used as a vehicle to reopen discussions on the Council's mandate, working methods, or mechanisms.**

We encourage Member States to approach the review with the objective of strengthening, not weakening, the Council's ability to promote and protect human rights worldwide.

Please accept, Excellencies, the assurances of our highest consideration.

Signatories:

1. International Service for Human Rights
2. Women Deliver
3. International Disability Alliance

4. DefendDefenders (East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project)
5. ILGA World (the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association)
6. Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights (EIPR)
7. Anti-Slavery International
8. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
9. Instituto Brasileiro de Direitos Humanos (IBDH)
10. Colombian Commission of Jurists
11. Centro de investigación de mujeres juristas por los derechos humanos
12. Franciscans International
13. Peace Brigades International
14. Hawai'i Institute for Human Rights
15. Conselho Indigenista Missionário (CIMI)
16. Europe Brazil Office (EBO)
17. Global Albinism Alliance
18. Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID)
19. RacismoMX (Acción Antirracista)
20. Rede Nacional de Mulheres Negras no Combate à Violência (Brasil)
21. Movimiento sociocultural de trabajo humanitario y ambiental
22. Save the Children International
23. Corporación Ilex Acción Jurídica
24. Human Rights Watch
25. Women's All Points Bulletin, WAPB
26. Diáspora Africana de la Argentina (DIAFAR)
27. Hivos
28. International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
29. Research Group "Direitos Humanos, Educação e Políticas Públicas" (DHEPP-UEG, Brazil)
30. Red de Mujeres Afrolatinoamericanas, Afrocaribeñas y de la Diáspora
31. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
32. Humanists International
33. Coalizão Negra por Direitos (Brazil)

34. Orolab
35. Gulf Centre for Human Rights
36. Instituto de Referência Negra Peregum (Brazil)
37. Uneafro Brasil (Brazil)
38. Movimento Negro Evangélico (Brazil)
39. Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)
40. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies (CIHRS)
41. Casa Marielle Franco Brasil
42. West African Human Rights Defenders' Network
43. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute (IBAHRI)
44. Privacy International
45. ARTICLE 19
46. International Commission of Jurists
47. International Rehabilitation Council for Torture victims (IRCT)
48. Child Rights Connect
49. Mouvement contre le racisme et pour l'amitié entre les peuples (MRAP)
50. American Association of Jurists (AAJ)
51. Plan International Inc
52. Fórum Internacional Fontié ki Kwaze - Fronteiras Cruzadas (Brazil)
53. Lawyers for Lawyers
54. FIAN International
55. CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide)