

United Nations Human Rights Council

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The United Nations Human Rights Council (hereinafter – the HRC) is the main UN body in the field of human rights. The HRC is an inter-governmental body responsible for the promotion and protection of human rights around the world, as well as addressing systematic human rights violations, and making recommendations on them. The HRC was established on 15 March 2006, replacing the former Commission on Human Rights. By establishing the HRC, a number of new mechanisms were created: the Universal Periodic Review, the Advisory Committee and the Complaint Procedure.



The HRC is made of 47 Member States (African States – 13, Western European and Other States – 7, Asia-Pacific States – 13, Latin American and Caribbean States – 8, Eastern European States – 6), which are elected for a period of three years by the UN General Assembly. In 2014 the UN General Assembly elected Latvia to the HRC for the 2015-2017 term (until January 1st, 2018). Currently Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Spain are the EU states represented in the HRC.



The HRC holds no fewer than three regular sessions a year, for a total of 10 weeks. The sessions are held in March (4 weeks), June (3 weeks) and September (3 weeks). At the request of one third of the Member States, the HRC can decide at any time to hold a special session to address human rights violations and emergencies. So far 28 special sessions have been held, the most recent of which took place in May 2018 on the deteriorating situation of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem.

Universal Periodic Review

The creation of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism was a significant innovation upon establishment of the HRC. Within the system, the HRC reviews the human rights records of all UN Member States. Each year national reports by 42 States (both the HRC Member States and observer States) are being reviewed. The review takes into account information provided by the governments, UN bodies, Special Procedures Mandate Holders and non-governmental organizations, as well as recommendations from other countries. Reviews take place through an interactive dialogue between the State under review and other UN Member States. Recommendations are not legally binding, but within the next review cycle, the states are expected to report on the implementation of the recommendations they have accepted. The second review cycle started in 2012 and, within it, Member States reported on the implementation of the recommendations received during the first cycle and their latest accomplishments in the field of human rights. Latvia presented its first national report in 2011, second in 2016, and intends to present the third report in 2021.

 [National report of the Republic of Latvia in the framework of the 1st cycle of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, 2011.](#) 

 [National report of the Republic of Latvia in the framework of the 2nd cycle of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, 2016.](#) 

 [National report of the Republic of Latvia in the framework of the 3rd cycle of the United Nations Universal Periodic Review, 2021.](#) 

Special Procedures

The system of Special Procedures is a central element of the HRC machinery. These are independent human rights experts or working groups with mandates to report and to advise on human rights from a thematic or country-specific perspective. The *ad hoc* character of the Special Procedures gives a chance to respond more flexibly to the violations of human rights, in comparison with the UN treaty bodies. Special Procedures mandate holders report either in their personal capacity or as members of Working Groups. They carry out country visits, send communications to governments, convene expert consultations, examine, monitor and publicly report on human rights situations. After the visits, reports are issued containing information gathered during the visit

and recommendations to the State concerned. The recommendations are not legally binding. Special Procedures report annually to the Human Rights Council; the majority of the mandates also reports to the General Assembly.

Currently there are 44 thematic and 12 country mandates. Special Procedures mandate holders deal with thematic issues such as freedom of religion, violence against women and others. In the case of country mandates, human rights situations in specific countries or territories are monitored, and analysed. Country mandates have been established on the human rights situations in Belarus, Cambodia, the Central African Republic, Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Eritrea, Islamic Republic of Iran, Mali, Myanmar, the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, Somalia, Sudan, and the Syrian Arab Republic.

A "standing invitation" means that a country is prepared to receive a visit from any UN Special Procedures mandate holder whenever they request (in practice, the time of the visits is agreed in advance). Latvia was one of the first countries to issue a standing invitation in 2001. In 2007, Latvia started an initiative of encouraging the UN member states which have not done so to issue a standing invitation. Since the start of the initiative, the number of countries that have extended standing invitations has increased from 57 to over one hundred. Latvia regularly raises this issue at the HRC and in bilateral contacts. In September 2019, Jānis Kārkliņš, the Latvian Ambassador to the UN in Geneva, addressed the HRC on behalf of 64 States, calling on the Member States to issue standing invitations and improve cooperation with the Special Procedures mandate holders.

UN Special Procedures mandate holders have visited Latvia four times – the Working Group on arbitrary detention in 2004, the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in 2007, the Special Rapporteur on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography in 2008, and the Independent Expert on the effects of foreign debt and other related international financial obligations of States on the full enjoyment of all human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights in 2012. In 2005, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus visited Latvia (also Lithuania, Poland, and Estonia), because Belarusian authorities had denied him the right to enter their country.

<https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/united-nations-human-rights-council>