

HRC President calls on General Assembly to adequately fund UN human rights programme

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(New York) Addressing the UN General Assembly, the President of the Human Rights Council welcomed the significant progress made by the Human Rights Council in dealing with human rights issues worldwide in the past year. He highlighted the Council's decision to designate a focal point on reprisals (Resolution 24/24), the establishment by the Council of a new thematic mandate on the rights of older persons, and of new country-specific mandates on the Central African Republic and on Mali.



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He regretted that the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had been requested to implement an increasing number of Council-mandated activities despite the fact that OHCHR's budget has not kept pace with that growth. The report of the Council was presented by the President to the Third Committee and to the General Assembly on 13 November. The presentations were followed by interactive dialogues with Member States.

On the issue of reprisals for civil society participation and cooperation with the UN's human rights mechanisms, States expressed divergent views on the Council decision to request the Secretary-General to designate a UN-wide senior focal point to 'promote the prevention of, protection against and accountability for reprisals and intimidation.'

Gabon (speaking on behalf of the African Group), India, and Eritrea called for further reflection and deliberation by States before a final decision. In their view, the universal membership, that is, the General Assembly (rather than the limited membership of the Human Rights Council), should determine the outcome in matters with such serious political ramifications. Ethiopia and South Africa further argued that domestic legislation and jurisprudence are adequate tools to deal with reprisals and intimidation against individuals. Others expressed their support for the Council decision, including delegates from Botswana and Liechtenstein, who said the decisions made at the Council should not be undermined or politicised at the General Assembly. The EU and Chile expressed their full support for a high-level focal point, and also praised the President for taking a proactive focus on curbing reprisals towards human rights defenders given that their input is crucial for the effective work of the Council. The President stressed that, irrespective of the diverging positions of States, it was important to send a strong political sign that reprisals are not acceptable.

Numerous delegations commented on the budgetary challenges faced by the Council and the OHCHR. Several expressed concern that the gap between policy formulation and implementation is growing, while the regular budget continues to be reduced. Thailand, Switzerland, Nigeria, Norway and Botswana all urged the UN committee dealing with budgetary issues (i.e. the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly) to support human rights funding, emphasising that although human rights is one of the three pillars of the UN, a mere 3 percent of the UN general budget is allocated to human rights activities. Norway also agreed that the UN membership has a responsibility to ensure that OHCHR — the UN's lead agency for human rights protection and promotion — can fulfil its mandate in the light of increasing demands.

Though the President had highlighted a number of successful cross-regional initiatives in the Council, several countries (China, Pakistan, Malaysia, Sudan, Eritrea, and Belarus) complained about the perceived politicisation of the Council's work, and indicated that country-specific mandates should be abolished. Other

States (EU, Japan, the Ukraine, Norway and Botswana) recognised the Council's innovative and indispensable mechanisms, including the system of special procedures and the Universal Periodic Review, were crucial in advancing the human rights in every State. Norway commented that stronger country-specific resolutions were needed, as well as stronger resolutions on women's rights, and on the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender persons.

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