

[Human Rights Council at 10: Civil society outlines plan for HRC to become more protective, effective and accessible](#)

28.04.2016

Twenty leading human rights organisations from across the world have come together to develop a concrete plan to make the UN Human Rights Council more accessible to rights holders, more protective for victims of human rights violations, and more effective in holding States and non-State actors to account.



Update: On Monday 13 June 2016, the ISHR delivered a [joint statement](#) with Article 19 and International Federation for Human Rights at the 32nd session of the Human Rights Council during a 'HRC at 10' event.



(Geneva) - At 10 years, the UN's peak human rights body should move to become more accessible to rights holders, more protective for victims of human rights violations, and more effective in holding States and non-State actors to account.

In a [joint civil society paper](#) published on the occasion of the anniversary of the Human Rights Council, 20 leading national, regional and international human rights NGOs outline a series of concrete steps and proposals that would strengthen the impact of the Council's work.

'While the 10th anniversary is an opportunity to take stock of progress, it is first and foremost a critical moment for States to commit to a body that protects and promotes fundamental human rights more effectively,' said Michael Ineichen, ISHR's Human Rights Council Advocacy Director.

'This joint civil society paper provides concrete ideas and steps that States and UN officials can take today, to lay the foundations for a better Human Rights Council for all in the future,' Mr Ineichen said.

Key points

- 20 leading human rights groups set out steps towards a more [accessible, effective and protective](#) Human Rights Council.
 - Membership in the Council must be tied to concrete contributions to protecting rights at home and internationally.
 - Human Rights Council decisions must move from paper to implementation.
 - Chronic and urgent situations of human rights violations must be addressed swiftly and robustly.
 - Human rights defenders and civil society must be protected and supported in addressing the UN.
 - Institutional tweaks to the Council could increase its impact, strengthen the role of the President, and raise the Status of human rights within the UN.
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The civil society paper outlines a broad vision of a Council that directly guides the actions of State and non-state actors, addresses serious rights violations head on, provides space for civil society, and demands better adherence to basic membership standards.

The paper was coordinated by ISHR with the input of leading organisations from all regions, including the Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA), Conectas, CELS, the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project, and international groups such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

'The joint civil society paper provides important elements to begin a conversation towards a more effective Human Rights Council,' said R. Iniyan Ilango, UN Advocacy Programme Manager at [FORUM-ASIA](#).

'To succeed such conversations will have to genuinely focus on strengthening the human rights pillar of the UN and equally include voices of diverse actors from both the global South and North,' Mr Ilango said.

Putting a price on Council membership

Among the proposals to increase the body's effectiveness are a range of steps to enhance the membership of the Council, such as a pledge by electing States to genuinely consider factors such as a candidate's State's progress in protecting human rights, decisively implementing international recommendations, and cooperating fully and in good faith with the Council and its expert mechanisms.

Recent elections to the Human Rights Council in 2015 were criticised by human rights groups on the basis that they were not sufficiently open and competitive and that political considerations trumped human rights concerns for many states in exercising their votes.

Enhancing civil society input and impact on the Council

Ending threats and attacks against human rights defenders in retaliation for their cooperation with the Council is among the key recommendations contained in the paper, as is increasing both physical space and remote participation opportunities for national level civil society.

'The distance between the Council and local societies in different countries is worrying, and is also a consequence of the limited dissemination of what States are discussing in Geneva,' said Camila Asano, Foreign Policy Coordinator of Conectas Human Rights in Brazil.

'Sadly, many national civil society groups struggle to find out their own country's position at the Council. States must commit themselves to increase the accountability on foreign policy and create mechanisms for access to information and social participation while building the positions to be taken in Geneva,' Ms Asano said.

Stepping up implementation of Council decisions

A weakness in the Council's work is the lack of implementation of its decisions by States, the paper says. An increase in financial resources for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Council's human rights experts, along with the consistent use of benchmarks in Human Rights Council resolutions to measure progress towards implementation, are highlighted in the paper as key steps to remedy weaknesses.

'The Council should serve as a catalyst for the struggles of local social actors,' said Gabriela Kletzel, Director of the International Team at the Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales (CELS) in Argentina.

'Shortening the distance between on-the-ground realities and discussions in Geneva would not only strengthen implementation, but also enable the Council to address human rights violations in a more timely way,' Ms Kletzel said.

Addressing urgent human rights situations and preventing human rights crises

Among the longstanding critiques of the Human Rights Council is the lack of swift and decisive responses in

situations of chronic or emerging human rights violations.

'The Council must act to address human rights situations, including gross and systematic violations, impartially, objectively and without selectivity. While the Council has brought global attention to a number of significant human rights violations, and put in place mechanisms to ensure continued scrutiny, challenges remain, many situations are unaddressed, and all too often politics trump human rights,' said John Fisher, Geneva Director with Human Rights Watch.

To this end, the civil society paper calls on principled States to come together to develop and implement a joint pledge to request a special session of the Council, or to commence work on a situation- or country-specific initiative, in situations that meet a certain threshold, or are referred to the Council by independent actors. Such triggers could include, for example:

- the High Commissioner for Human Rights suggesting Council action;
- a group of four or more Special Procedures mandate holders suggesting Council action;
- relevant regional mechanisms flagging a situation as requiring the Council's attention;
- the General Assembly or the Security Council flagging a situation as requiring the Council's attention; or
- a group comprising a State's A-status NHRI, together with three or more ECOSOC-accredited NGOs, suggesting Council action.

Implemented effectively, such an initiative could substantially strengthen the Council's ability and track record when it comes to fulfilling its own mandate to contribute to the 'prevention of human rights violations and respond promptly to human rights emergencies,' Mr Ineichen said.

The civil society paper will be formally launched at forthcoming high-level events in Geneva and New York.

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