

Key developments at the 22nd session of the Human Rights Council

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Important language on women human rights defenders was included in a resolution on peaceful protests adopted unanimously by the Council. During negotiations on the text, this language had been deleted by the main sponsors, Switzerland, in the face of objections from some States. However, after numerous cosponsors expressed their disappointment on this amendment, the phrase on women human rights defenders was reinserted, acknowledging that the specific threats faced by women in the context of peaceful protests. At the vote, Switzerland stated that the resolution calls for all States to foster a safe environment for the exercise of freedom of expression by all groups, in particular by ensuring that domestic legislation is in line with international human rights obligations. The resolution also calls for a seminar to be held on best practices for the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protests.

Egypt postpones its overly narrow resolution on protection of the family

Consideration of a last-minute tabled resolution on the protection of the family was ultimately postponed by the lead State, Egypt. The announcement came after Latin American and EU States gathered support amongst Council members for possible amendments to the text. Those amendments would have responded to NGOs' concerns that the resolution did not ensure respect for the rights of all individuals in different forms of families (including one parent families, families headed by children orphaned by HIV, or war). The controversial draft text called for a panel discussion on 'protection of the family' with the goal of addressing the obligations of States in this regard, and despite its postponement, can be expected to resurface at future sessions of the Council.

Council calls for Sri Lanka to make good on its commitment to accountability

The latest US-led resolution on Sri Lanka was adopted with 25 votes in favour, 13 against, and 8 abstentions, in the face of strongly expressed opposition from Sri Lanka to the 'disproportionate' and 'unwarranted' attention to the situation in the [country](#). India, however, voted in favour of the resolution, urging Sri Lanka to take measures to ensure accountability to the satisfaction of the international community, while Sierra Leone said it was 'compelled' to vote in favour of the resolution, on the basis of its own experience with civil war and its belief that the resolution serves the purpose of meaningful accountability and reconciliation.

Cuba continues attempts to create Council oversight of OHCHR

During voting on a resolution on the regional balance of staff within the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Cuba, the lead State, dismissed claims that it is not the Council's place to take up this subject. It also denied that the purpose of the resolution is to undermine the independence of OHCHR. The US and Ireland clearly set out that member States of the Council have no role in instructing OHCHR on its staffing. Despite such long standing concerns, the resolution was adopted with 31 votes in favour, 15 against, and 1 abstention.

Council establishes Commission of Inquiry into the situation in DPRK

The Council unanimously agreed to establish a commission of inquiry for a period of one year to investigate the human rights situation in the Democratic Republic of Korea, to ensure accountability including for crimes against humanity. The creation of the commission comes after the Special Rapporteur on the situation in the country, who has not been granted entry, recommended such a mechanism as a means to carry out more comprehensive investigations into the violations ongoing in the country, attribute responsibility, and make

recommendations for effective action to the international community. The DPRK made clear its 'resolute resentment' at the 'political' resolution.

Syria, Iran condemn Council's focus on their countries

The extension of the commission on inquiry into the situation in Syria for 12 months, and of the mandate of the Special Rapporteur of the situation in Iran, saw confrontational responses by the countries concerned. Iran stated that the focus on itself was selective and a result of politicised motives, while Syria described the resolution on its own situation as an 'abuse of the Council's authority'. These reactions were echoed by other States, including Ecuador and Venezuela. The latter describing such initiatives as an attack on sovereignty and as 'imperialist'. Venezuela was the only State to vote against the resolution on Syrian, with Ecuador joining Kazakhstan, India, the Philippines, and Uganda in abstaining. The resolution on Iran was adopted with 26 in favour, 2 against (Venezuela and Pakistan), and 17 abstentions.

Council holds its annual discussion on technical cooperation

The Human Rights Council held its annual discussion on technical cooperation, under the theme of promoting technical cooperation for the strengthening of the judicial system and the administration of justice in order to ensure human rights and the rule of law. The United States said that the key to success is that each technical cooperation programme must be as unique as the society and people it is designed to assist. Japan and Indonesia emphasised that the provision of technical assistance and capacity building should be based on close consultation with, and the consent of, the States concerned, taking into account their needs and respecting their ownership of the process. There was no conversation about establishing indicators and benchmarks to measure the results of technical assistance efforts.