

HRC47 | Key issues on agenda of June 2021 session

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The 47th session of the UN Human Rights Council, from 21 June to 15 July 2021, will consider issues including systemic racism, police brutality and violence against peaceful protesters, sexual orientation and gender identity, violence and discrimination against women and girls, poverty, peaceful assembly and association, and freedom of expression, among others. It will also present an opportunity to address human rights situations in States including China, the United States, Venezuela, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Colombia, Eritrea, Belarus and Syria, among many others. Here's an overview of some of the key issues that are, or should be, on the agenda.



The UN Human Rights Council (the Council) will hold its 47th regular session at Palais des Nations in Geneva from 21 June to 15 July 2021.

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During the session, follow the live-updated programme of work on [Sched](#).

Modalities of participation in HRC47

According to the [Bureau minutes of 2 and 4 June 2021](#), the extraordinary modalities for the 47th session should be similar to the modalities applied during the 46th session. NGOs in consultative status with ECOSOC are invited to submit pre-recorded video statements for interactive dialogues as well as for panel discussions and UPR adoptions as set out in Council decision 19/119. The full official name of the NGO should be displayed within the video. There will be no general debates at this session. Side events cannot take place inside the Palais des Nations during the 47th session. In case NGOs decide to organise virtual events in parallel to the 47th session, information on such events may be listed on the OHCHR civil society webpage along with a statement indicating that the events are not official Council events. The Council adopted the above-modalities proposed by the Bureau on 7 June. Read [here](#) the information note by the Secretariat which is updated according to latest information and an additional [explainer by HRC-net](#), also available in Arabic, French and Spanish (to be updated).

#HRC47 | Thematic areas of interest

Here are some highlights of the session's thematic discussions

Sexual orientation and gender identity

The Independent Expert on protection against violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity will present his report, followed by an interactive dialogue on 24 June. The report seeks to document how particular narratives on gender are being used to fuel violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. In the report, the Expert examines how the incorporation of comprehensive gender theory enables more accurate and appropriate consideration of dynamics of negation and stigma, and the key role of law, public policy and access to justice in promoting either continuity of injustice or social change.

The report highlights the mandate's position in relation to current narratives and constructions through which the application of gender frameworks, especially its promise for gender equality across diverse persons, is challenged; and build on gender concepts and feminist analysis to further substantiate the mandate's understanding of root causes and dynamics of violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.

This report will be presented in the context of high levels of violence against trans and gender nonconforming people and those defending their rights. Beyond this, [the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted](#) trans and gender nonconforming people and those defending their rights worldwide, especially those most marginalised.

Systemic racism, police brutality and violence against peaceful protests in the United States and globally

The High Commissioner will present the comprehensive report of [Resolution 43/1](#) to the Council on 12 July followed by an interactive dialogue. ISHR previously joined 171 families of victims of police violence in the United States and over 270 civil society organisations from more than 40 countries in [calling on the Council to establish](#) an independent commission of inquiry into police killings of Black men and women, as well as violent law enforcement responses to protests in the **United States**. We also called for a thematic commission of inquiry empowered to **investigate systemic racism in law enforcement globally, especially where it is relates to legacies of colonialism and the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans**, as [called](#) for by UN Special Procedures.

ISHR, Comité Adama, association « A Qui Le Tour ? » and Mike Ben Peter's family previously submitted a [joint report to the High Commissioner](#) to draw her attention to cases of police brutality that caused the deaths of two Black men in **France** and **Switzerland**: Adama Traoré in France in 2016, and Mike Ben Peter in Switzerland in 2018. The joint submission highlights the racially charged police violence and the judicial irregularities which usually surround them.

The Council should ensure the establishment of robust international accountability mechanisms which would further support and complement, not undermine, efforts to dismantle systemic racism in the United States and globally, especially in the context of police violence against Black people.

Background: In June 2020, the Council convened a historic urgent debate on “current racially inspired human rights violations, systemic racism, police violence and violence against peaceful protests”. George Floyd’s brother, Philonise Floyd, made a [historic address](#) calling on the Council to establish an [independent international commission of inquiry](#) focused on the situation in the United States. The Africa Group [called](#) on the Council to establish a commission of inquiry following the police murder of George Floyd and subsequent racial justice protests, but the Council instead [adopted a watered-down resolution](#) due to pressure from the United States and other allied countries. It [mandated](#) the High Commissioner to prepare a report on systemic racism, human rights violations against Africans and people of African descent by law enforcement in the United States and beyond, and governments' responses to anti-racism protests. The High Commissioner affirmed in her updates to the Council in [September 2020](#) and [March 2021](#) that the report will reflect and amplify the voices of victims of people of African descent, their families and communities, and over 150 States, including the United States, [jointly welcomed](#) that the implementation of HRC Resolution 43/1 will centre victims and their families.

Business and human rights

June 2021 marks the tenth anniversary of the [unanimous endorsement](#) by the Council of the [United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights](#) (UNGPs). The Guiding Principles have become one of the key frameworks for private business to carry out their responsibility to respect human rights, for States to discharge their obligations under international law in relation to business activities, and for civil society and human rights defenders to utilise the UNGPs to demand structural changes in the way companies operate internationally. Human rights need to be an essential element of how businesses design their operations. After 10 years, we have the chance to look back and into the future with a critical eye. In that regard, a 'Roadmap for the Next Decade' will be presented by the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights this month. ISHR continues to work with the UN, civil society and progressive companies to protect and promote the work of human rights defenders.

In tandem with its annual report, the UN Working Group will also present in June a long-awaited guidance document on business and human rights defenders based on the UNGPs. The 'United Nations Guidance on the

role of the Guiding Principles for engaging with, safeguarding and ensuring respect for the rights of human rights defenders' was supported and informed by ISHR and partners, and builds on the experiences gathered through the Business Network on Civic Freedoms and Human Rights Defenders, an initiative ISHR co-founded with the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre. This document will become a key instrument for civil society, businesses and States in ensuring that human rights defenders are protected and recognised as essential actors in maintaining rule of law and a functioning shared civic space.

The Working Group on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises will present its reports, followed by an interactive dialogue, on 29 June.

Reprisals

Reports of cases of intimidation and reprisal against those cooperating or seeking to cooperate with the UN not only continue, but grow. Intimidation and reprisals violate the rights of the individuals concerned, they constitute violations of international human rights law, and they undermine the UN human rights system.

The UN has taken action towards addressing this critical issue including:

- Establishing a dedicated dialogue under item 5 to take place every September;
- Affirmation by the Council of the particular responsibilities of its Members, President and Vice-Presidents to investigate and promote accountability for reprisals and intimidation; and
- The appointment of the UN Assistant Secretary General on Human Rights as the Senior Official on addressing reprisals.

Notwithstanding these positive actions, ISHR remains deeply concerned about reprisals against civil society actors who try to engage with UN mechanisms, and consistent in its calls for all States and the Council to do more to address the situation.

During the 42nd session, the Council [adopted](#) a resolution which listed key trends such as the patterns of reprisals, increasing self-censorship, the use of national security arguments and counter-terrorism strategies by States as justification for blocking access to the UN. The resolution also acknowledged the specific risks to individuals in vulnerable situations or belonging to marginalised groups, and called on the UN to implement gender-responsive policies to end reprisals. The Council called on States to combat impunity and to report back to it on how they are preventing reprisals, both online and offline.

Item 5 of the Human Rights Council's agenda provides a key opportunity for States to raise concerns about reprisals, and for governments involved in existing cases to provide an update to the Council on any investigation or action taken toward accountability to be carried out.

During the organisational meeting held on 7 June, the President of the Council stressed the importance of ensuring the safety of those participating in the Council's work, and the obligation of States to prevent intimidation or reprisals.

[ISHR recently launched a study](#) analysing 709 reprisals cases and situations documented by the UN Secretary-General between 2010 and 2020 and looked at trends and patterns in the kinds of cases documented by the UNSG, how these cases have been followed up on over time, and whether reprisal victims consider the UN's response effective. Among other things, [the study](#) found that nearly half the countries serving on the Council have been cited for perpetrating reprisals. The study also found that the HRC Presidency appears to have been conspicuously inactive on intimidation and reprisals, despite the overall growing numbers of cases that are reported by the UNSG – including on individuals' or groups' engagement with the HRC – and despite the [Presidency's legal obligation to address such violations](#). The study found that the HRC Presidency took publicly reported action in only 6 percent of cases or situations where individuals or organisations had engaged with the HRC. Not only is this a particularly poor record in its own right, it also compares badly with other UN actors.

In line with [previous calls](#), ISHR expects the President of the Human Rights Council to publicly identify and denounce specific instances of reprisals by issuing formal statements, conducting press-briefings,

corresponding directly with the State concerned, publicly releasing such correspondence, and insisting on undertakings from the State concerned to investigate, hold the perpetrators accountable and report back to the Council on action taken.

Other thematic reports

At this 47th session, the Council will discuss a range of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights through dedicated debates with the mandate holders and the High Commissioner, including interactive dialogues with:

- The High Commissioner on State response to **pandemics**
- The Special Rapporteur on the right to **housing**
- The Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of **physical and mental health**
- The Independent Expert on human rights and **international solidarity**
- The Special Rapporteur on the right to **education**
- The Special Rapporteur on extreme **poverty** and human rights
- The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary **executions**
- The Special Rapporteur on the rights to freedom of **peaceful assembly and of association**
- The Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of **opinion and expression**
- The Working Group on **arbitrary detention on its study on drug policies**
- The Special Rapporteur on the right to **privacy**

In addition, the Council will hold dedicated debates on the rights of specific groups including:

- The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of **migrants**
- The Special Rapporteur on the human rights of **internally displaced persons**
- The Special Adviser on Prevention of **Genocide**
- The Working Group on **discrimination against women and girls**
- The Special Rapporteur on **violence against women**, its causes and consequences
- The Special Rapporteur on **trafficking** in persons, especially women and children
- The Special Rapporteur on the independence of **judges and lawyers**
- The Special Rapporteur on the elimination of discrimination against persons affected by **leprosy** and their family members

#HRC47 | Country-specific developments

China

One year after the UN Special Procedures issued a [sweeping statement](#) calling for the international community to take 'decisive action' on the human rights situation in China, much more remains to be done. Calls are growing for more clear and timely reporting from the UN, including the High Commissioner for Human Rights and her Office, on the [repressive policies and practices targeting Uyghurs](#) and other Turkic Muslims. At the same time, worrying news continues about violations of cultural rights of Tibetans, while Hong Kong's democratic institutions - and its people - have suffered a series of blows from legislative, policy and legal decision targeting pro-democracy leaders. For the first time since 1989, peaceful public demonstrations to [commemorate the massacre on Tiananmen Square](#) were prohibited.

Against this context, ISHR urges States to speak out firmly against the lack of accountability for the Chinese government in light of substantial evidence of violations, including crimes against humanity. In so doing, it is essential to recognise the systemic and structural nature of these violations: to highlight the dire situation for Uyghurs, Tibetans and other minority groups; pro-democracy civil society leaders, lawyers and legislators in Hong Kong; and human rights defenders like [lawyer and Martin Ennals Award winner Yu Wensheng](#) and anti-discrimination activists like the Changsha 3. No matter its position or influence, China must be held to the same high standards as any other Council member.

Egypt

At the 46th session of the Council, over 30 States led by Finland [urged Egypt to end its repression of human rights defenders](#), LGBTI persons, journalists, politicians and lawyers under the guise of countering-terrorism. The joint State statement ended years of a lack of collective action at the Council on Egypt, despite the sharply deteriorating human rights situation in the country. Egypt must answer these calls, starting by releasing the thousands arbitrarily detained, protecting those in custody from torture and other ill-treatment, and ending the crackdown on peaceful activists. The UN Working Group on [Arbitrary Detention](#) has previously concluded that arbitrary detention is a systematic problem in Egypt and the Committee against Torture has [concluded](#) that torture is a systematic practice in Egypt. To date, Egypt has failed to address all the concerns expressed by States, the High Commissioner and Special Procedures, despite repeated calls on the government, including [most recently by over 60 NGOs](#). ISHR joined over 100 NGOs from across the world in urging the Council to establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism on Egypt and will continue to do so until there is meaningful and sustained improvement in the country's human rights situation.

Saudi Arabia

This session will mark two years since the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions presented to the Council the [investigation](#) into the unlawful death of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and yet no meaningful steps towards accountability have been taken by the Saudi authorities. The Special Rapporteur called on Saudi Arabia to “demonstrate non-repetition by: releasing all individuals imprisoned for the peaceful expression of their opinion and belief; independently investigating all allegations of torture and lethal use of force in formal and informal places of detention; and independently investigating all allegations of enforced disappearances and making public the whereabouts of individuals disappeared”. To date, Saudi Arabia has refused to address these key concerns, which were also raised by over 40 States at the Council in [March 2019](#), [September 2019](#) and [September 2020](#), further demonstrating its lack of political will to genuinely improve the human rights situation and to engage constructively with the Council. The sentencing and [subsequent release of several women's rights activists](#) highlights the importance of the Council's scrutiny which must be sustained in order to secure meaningful, concrete, and systematic gains. We recall that the Special Rapporteur also called on Member States to support resolutions that seek to ensure or strengthen accountability for the execution of Khashoggi. ISHR [reiterates](#) its call on the Council to establish a monitoring and reporting mechanism on the human rights situation in Saudi Arabia.

Colombia

After more than a month of strikes and street protests in Colombia, which have seen protestors killed at the hands of law enforcement officers and civilians, and human rights defenders covering the events threatened and attacked, the Council session provides States with the opportunity to take action. States must call on Colombia to respect the human rights of its people - including the right to freedom of peaceful assembly - and address the underlying causes of the protests, including violations of economic, social and cultural rights, inequality and racial discrimination. This situation of violence and non-compliance with all standards of the use of force has had a particular impact on the Afro-descendant population. Specific calls from Colombian civil society include for OHCHR to investigate and report on the protests in the country including gather statistical data on the facts that threaten the human rights of Afro-Colombian people; for the High Commissioner to visit Colombia when possible; and for Colombia to open its doors to a range of Special Rapporteurs to allow for ongoing monitoring and reporting. The High Commissioner, who has made a statement on the situation in the country, will present her annual report at the start of the session and it is hoped and expected that Colombia will feature as a country of concern.

Nicaragua

Last March, the Council [renewed its resolution on the human rights situation in Nicaragua](#), which strengthened the High Commissioner's office monitoring and reporting mandate, by including an interim oral update with recommendations in the context of upcoming national elections. Despite the resolution's clear calls on the Government to repeal recently adopted laws that harshly restrict civic space, stop targeting

human rights defenders and journalists, and urgently implement reforms to ensure free and credible elections, the Nicaraguan authorities have acted in the opposite direction. While UN experts '[deplore spate of attacks and arrests of human rights defenders](#)', the OHCHR publicly expressed their deep concern that 'Nicaragua's chances of holding free and genuine elections on 7 November are diminishing as a result of measures taken by authorities against political parties, candidates and independent journalists, which further restrict the civic and democratic space'. As the High Commissioner will present her oral update on Nicaragua on 22 June, States should call on Nicaragua to urgently reverse course and implement the recommendations from [resolution 46/2](#), in particular to guarantee the enjoyment of the rights to freedom of information, expression, association and assembly, and the right to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and to swiftly put an end to the harassment (including the judicial harassment) and detention of journalists and ex-members of the [Violeta Chamorro Foundation](#) and Confidential media outlet.

Venezuela

Venezuela will be back on the Council's agenda with OHCHR providing an update on the situation of human rights in the country, including in regard to UN recommendations (5 July). Recent positive developments in the country, including the nomination to the National Electoral Council of individuals supported by a broad swathe of civil society, are offset by continuing human rights and humanitarian crises. The UN's recommendations to Venezuela are numerous, wide-ranging and largely ignored. States must use opportunities at the Council to press home the importance of those recommendations being heeded. ISHR looks forward to making a statement during the dialogue, focusing in on levels of implementation of recommendations. Given that reprisals against Venezuelan defenders have been common over recent years - with cases cited in eight of the Secretary General's reports on cooperation with the UN since 2010 - it is essential that States speak out in support of civil society engagement and that the UN define a preventative strategy to ensure defenders' protection.

Burundi

On 30 June 2020, the Supreme Court of Burundi set aside the ruling by the Appeals Court to uphold the 32-year sentence in Rukuki's case and ordered a second appeal hearing, citing violations to his right to a fair trial. This second appeal hearing took place 8 months later on 24 March 2021 in Ngozi prison, where he is currently detained. According to the Burundian Code of Criminal Procedure, following the hearing the Court has 30 days to return a verdict on the case, but this verdict is still pending nearly 60 days later. This delay clearly demonstrates a lack of due process in the case of the internationally recognised human rights defender and political prisoner. In an open letter, a group of civil society organisations denounced the dysfunctioning of judicial proceedings in the country. After confirming the 32 years sentence of defender Germain Rukuki, Burundi continues its crackdown against civil society. Germain Rukuki has now spent nearly 4 years in prison. He has already waited an additional 30 days for this final verdict to be announced without any legal reason; he should not have to wait any longer. In addition to ensuring the continued work of the Commission of Inquiry on Burundi, members of the Council need to call on Burundi to demonstrate their commitment to respect the independence of the judiciary and comply fully with the fair trial obligations of Burundi under international law and announce the verdict in this case without any further delay.

Other country situations

The Council will hold an interactive dialogue on the High Commissioner's annual report on 21 June 2021. The Council will consider reports on and is expected to consider resolutions addressing a range of country situations, in some instances involving the renewal of the relevant expert mandates. These include:

- Interactive Dialogue with the SR on the situation of human rights in **Eritrea**
- Oral update by the High Commissioner on the situation of human rights in **Nicaragua**
- Interactive Dialogue with the SR on the situation of human rights in **Belarus**
- Interactive Dialogue with the Commission of Inquiry on the **Syrian Arab Republic**
- Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner on the human rights situation of of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in **Myanmar** and Interactive Dialogue with the SR on the situation of human rights in Myanmar

- Interactive Dialogue with the SR on the situation of human rights in the **Palestinian Territories** occupied since 1967
- Interactive Dialogue with the High Commissioner on **Ukraine** and interim report of the Secretary-General on human rights in Crimea
- Interactive Dialogue with the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the **Central African Republic**

#HRC47 | Council programme, appointments and resolutions

During the organisational meeting for the 47th session held on 7 June the President of the Human Rights Council presented the programme of work. It includes seven panel discussions. States also announced at least 22 proposed resolutions. Read [here](#) the reports presented this session.

Appointment of mandate holders

The President of the Human Rights Council [proposed](#) four out of seven candidates for the following mandates:

1. The Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism;
2. The Special Rapporteur on the right to privacy;
3. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences;
4. Two members of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent (one from Asia-Pacific States and one from Eastern European States);
5. A member of the Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances, from Western European and other States;
6. 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

As of 8 June, however, the recommended candidates list was only available for four of the above positions, due to challenges among the Consultative Group, the five individuals appointed from each UN region to interview and shortlist candidates. It is critical that the process overcome such delays, so as to avoid any protection gaps arising from a failure to appoint a new mandateholder.

In view of the pending appointments, it is relevant to recall that in appointing mandate holders, the President of the Council is required to give particular attention to the need to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest. Mandate holders should also be genuinely committed to the independence and effectiveness of the special procedures system, and have a demonstrated commitment to civil society engagement and participation.

Resolutions to be presented to the Council's 47th session

At the organisational meeting on 7 June the following resolutions were announced (States leading the resolution in brackets):

1. **Menstrual hygiene**, human rights and gender equality (Africa Group)
2. Elimination of **harmful practices** (Africa Group)
3. Human rights and **international solidarity** (Cuba)
4. **Social Forum** (Cuba)
5. Cooperation with and assistance to **Ukraine** in the field of human rights (Ukraine)
6. Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in **Myanmar** (OIC)
7. The protection of human rights in the context of human immunodeficiency virus (**HIV**) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (**AIDS**) (Brazil, Colombia, Mozambique, Portugal, Thailand)
8. The human rights situation in the **Syrian Arab Republic**, on missing persons and enforced disappearances (France, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Kuwait, Netherlands, Qatar, Turkey, United Kingdom of

- Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America)
9. The human rights situation in **Belarus**, mandate renewal (EU)
 10. The human rights situation in **Eritrea**, mandate renewal (EU)
 11. Negative impact of **corruption** on the enjoyment of human rights (Austria, Argentina, Brazil, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Morocco, Poland, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland)
 12. Enhancement of **international cooperation** in the field of human rights (Azerbaijan on behalf of NAM)
 13. New and emerging **digital technologies** and human rights (Austria, Brazil, Denmark, Morocco, Republic of Korea, Singapore)
 14. Human rights of **migrants** (Mexico)
 15. Impact of **arms transfers** on human rights (Ecuador, Peru)
 16. Human rights and **climate change** (Bangladesh, Philippines, Viet Nam)
 17. **Civil society space** (Chile, Ireland, Japan, Sierra Leone, Tunisia)
 18. Realizing the equal enjoyment of the right to **education** by every girl (UAE, UK)
 19. Preventable **maternal mortality and morbidity** (Colombia, New Zealand, Estonia)
 20. The promotion, protection and enjoyment of human rights on the Internet (Brazil, Nigeria, Sweden, Tunisia, United States of America)
 21. Accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of **violence against women** (Canada)
 22. Right to **education** (Portugal)

Furthermore, according to the voluntary calendar for resolutions, it is possible that more resolutions could also be presented at this session. Read the calendar [here](#).

Adoption of Universal Periodic Review (UPR) reports

During this session, the Council will adopt the UPR working group reports on Federated States of Micronesia, Lebanon, Mauritania, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Australia, Saint Lucia, Nepal, Oman, Austria, Myanmar, Rwanda, Georgia, Sao Tome and Principe and Nauru.

ISHR supports human rights defenders in their interaction with the UPR. We publish and submit [briefing papers](#) regarding the situation facing human rights defenders in some States under review and advocate for the UPR to be used as a mechanism to support and protect human rights defenders on the ground.

Panel discussions

During each Council session, panel discussions are held to provide member States and NGOs with opportunities to hear from subject-matter experts and raise questions. Seven panel discussions are scheduled for this upcoming session:

1. High-level panel discussion on the multisectoral prevention of and response to **female genital mutilation**
2. Panel discussion on the tenth anniversary of the **Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights**
3. Panel discussion on the human rights of **older persons in the context of climate change** [accessible panel]
4. Annual full-day discussion on the human rights of women, one on **violence against women and girls with disabilities**, and another on **gender-equal socioeconomic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic**
5. Quadrennial panel discussion on promoting human rights through **sport** and the Olympic ideal [accessible panel]. **Theme:** The potential of leveraging sport and the Olympic ideal for promoting human rights for young people
6. Annual thematic panel discussion on **technical cooperation and capacity-building**. **Theme:** Technical cooperation to advance the right to education and ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all

Read here the [three year programme of work](#) of the Council with [supplementary information](#).

Read here [ISHR's recommendations on the the key issues that are or should be on the agenda](#) of the UN Human Rights Council in 2021.

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