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UN Human Rights Council Elections for 2027-2029 and the Responsibility to Protect

Today, 13 October 2026, the UN General Assembly (UNGA) elected Brazil, Burundi, Dominican Republic, Germany, Ghana, Ireland, Japan, Jordan, Kuwait, Nepal, Nigeria, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, Uruguay and Zambia to the Human Rights Council (HRC) for the 2027-2029 term. With their election, 23 of the Council's 47 members in 2027 will be "Friends of the Responsibility to Protect (R2P)" – states that have either appointed a Focal Point for R2P and/or joined the Group of Friends of R2P in New York and Geneva.

Following these 'clean slate' elections, newly elected members of the HRC have an opportunity to strengthen the Council's credibility and advance principled leadership in atrocity prevention. Membership in the HRC carries the obligation, set forth in UNGA Resolution 60/251, to uphold the highest standards of human rights and to fully cooperate with the Council's mechanisms and procedures. The re-election of Burundi therefore raises serious concerns about the Council's credibility. Burundi has a documented history of atrocity crimes, and serious human rights violations continue in a climate of widespread impunity. No meaningful structural reforms have been implemented to address long-standing concerns related to human rights, governance, justice and the rule of law. The government of Burundi has also consistently failed to cooperate with the HRC's mechanisms and has voted against resolutions addressing some of the world's gravest human rights crises, including in Sudan, Ukraine, South Sudan, Belarus and Eritrea.

Nevertheless, the new composition of the HRC presents a fresh chance to reinforce the Council's essential role in preventing atrocities and protecting populations at risk, particularly as several members have already demonstrated strong commitments to this goal. For a brief overview of how the new HRC members engage with R2P and their status with relevant international legal instruments, see the closing annex.

The HRC has an essential role in advancing R2P and supporting the prevention of mass atrocity crimes. In July 2020 the HRC reaffirmed this responsibility when it adopted Resolution 44/14 on the "Fifteenth anniversary of the responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, as enshrined in the World Summit Outcome of 2005." The HRC is equipped with a wide-ranging toolbox through its mechanisms and procedures that contribute to early warning, prevention, accountability and protection. These include the Universal Periodic Review (UPR), Special Procedures, investigative mechanisms such as Commissions of Inquiry (CoIs) and Fact-Finding Missions (FFMs), treaty bodies and the monitoring, reporting and technical assistance provided by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR).

Systematic or widespread human rights violations can serve as early warning signs of possible atrocities, making Geneva-based mechanisms an important source of early warning. UN Special Procedures, with both thematic and country-specific mandates, consistently raise concerns on human rights emergencies and emerging atrocity risks. Investigative mechanisms gather evidence of root causes and patterns of human rights violations and abuses, identify those responsible and document developments that can inform preventive action. Their detailed reports also deepen our understanding of evolving atrocity risk factors, deter potential perpetrators, promote accountability and identify structural reforms needed to strengthen national resilience. International treaty bodies and the UPR, meanwhile, hold states accountable to their human rights obligations by assessing performance and offering concrete recommendations for improvement. The UPR also fosters dialogue on strengthening national resilience and protecting fundamental human rights while maintaining international scrutiny on crisis situations not on the HRC's formal agenda.

These tools put elements of R2P into practice. They help states uphold their primary responsibility to protect, enable the international community to support prevention and can help mobilize timely responses when states are manifestly

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failing or unwilling to protect their populations. Since 2008 the HRC has referred to states' responsibility to protect their populations in at least 98 thematic and country resolutions. Since becoming operational in 2006, the Council has also established 42 investigative bodies to respond to situations involving serious human rights violations and abuses.

Yet the HRC's potential to prevent atrocities is too often undermined by a lack of political will, inconsistent action or a lack of objective criteria for decision-making. Selectivity and double standards not only undermine the Council's credibility but can erode trust, particularly among affected communities. Despite HRC-mandated investigative mechanisms producing clear documentation of potential atrocity crimes, the atrocity prevention lens and risk assessments have not been systematically incorporated into their mandates. Meaningful political follow-up to investigative findings is frequently lacking, with mechanisms sometimes terminated even while risks remain imminent – as seen in the decision to end the investigations into Ethiopia in 2023, for example. The divide between Geneva and New York also remains a barrier to cohesive action, limiting the ability of early warning generated by HRC mechanisms to effectively inform Security Council (UNSC) action.

Over the past 20 years, the HRC has become an essential space for affected communities to seek recognition, demand scrutiny and mobilize response. While the HRC – and wider UN human rights system – cannot and does not *enforce* rights, it performs another vital function: it provides a space for affected communities to demand attention and action; creates pressure on perpetrators; and keeps the promise of a rules-based order and accountability alive. This is particularly important when domestic avenues for protection and justice are effectively non-existent. The HRC is one of the few international spaces where victims can speak directly to the world, civil society can challenge silence and indifference and where governments can be held to account in full view of their peers. For those whose lives have been shattered by atrocity crimes, the HRC may not deliver justice overnight, but it can provide recognition, dignity and a pathway to continue pressing for change.

For the HRC to truly champion R2P, its members must move beyond rhetoric to practical, consistent action. The tools already exist; what is required is the political will to use them, the resources to sustain them and the commitment to bridge institutional divides. R2P is a promise to act on behalf of people for whom mass atrocities are not abstract concepts, but lived realities that threaten them, their loved ones and communities. Upholding this commitment is central to the HRC's responsibility to protect human rights and dignity for all.

In this regard, the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect encourages all newly elected and existing HRC members to utilize the broad array of tools to advance early warning, prevention, protection and accountability:

Integrating Early Warning and Atrocity Risk Assessments into Resolutions, Mandates and Processes

- Systematically integrate atrocity prevention language in all relevant thematic and country-specific resolutions, mandates and debates on cross-cutting human rights issues.
- Support the inclusion of gender- and age-specific indicators in monitoring, risk assessments and reporting to ensure more targeted, inclusive and effective preventive strategies.
- Mandate Special Procedures and investigative mechanisms to conduct country-specific atrocity risk assessments, including by utilizing the UN Framework of Analysis for Atrocity Crimes, and encourage systematic collaboration with the UN Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect (OSAPG), where relevant.
- Use the UPR process to detect early warning signs of potential mass atrocity crimes and raise relevant questions regarding the ratification and implementation of core human rights treaties, as well as risk factors related to systematic violations and abuses of human rights.

Political Mobilization, Principled Action and Follow-up

- Request the holding of Special Sessions or Urgent Debates when warning signs of atrocity crimes, or a deterioration of protracted crisis situations, emerge, including those arising between sessions.
- Request OHCHR to make use of inter-sessional briefings for deteriorating crisis situations.
- Use relevant country-specific or thematic interactive dialogues, including during the General Debate under Item 4, to raise concern of emerging or protracted atrocity crises.

- Co-sponsor and support resolutions addressing situations involving serious violations and atrocity risks, guided by the Irish Principles which lay out independent and objective considerations to guide decisions on whether and when the HRC should respond to a country-specific situation.
    - States that sponsor resolutions, as well as those involved in their implementation, should convene side events or briefings to discuss how these resolutions have been implemented, assess their impact and share challenges, lessons learned and good practices.
- Lead on initiatives to establish monitoring, reporting or investigative mandates.
- Provide sufficient funding and political support to Special Procedures, CoIs and FFMs.
    - Resources should be ensured for local service providers delivering medical and psychosocial support to witnesses.
    - Special Procedures should receive sufficient resources to hold regular consultations with civil society organizations, national human rights institutions and other relevant stakeholders.
- Sustain mandates for investigative mechanisms until risks have clearly subsided, avoiding premature closures.
- Strengthen follow-up on recommendations from the UPR, treaty bodies and investigative mechanisms by ensuring that relevant reports, analyses and recommendations are systematically shared with key stakeholders. This includes officials in capitals, relevant embassies and other intra-governmental bodies responsible for bilateral political, economic and diplomatic engagement with the country concerned.
    - Governments should also enhance the systematic use of this information, particularly detailed analysis identifying perpetrators, at-risk communities, specific violations and the financing of atrocities, to inform decisions related to bilateral sanctions, development and economic cooperation, trade agreements and peace or mediation efforts.

Accessibility and Engagement with Affected Communities

- Ensure that the HRC is a safe space for human rights defenders and victim and survivor community engagement, including by strongly condemning reprisals, harassment and intimidation by UN member states and other entities against persons, groups and organizations cooperating or seeking to cooperate with the Council and its mechanisms.
    - Governments should also work closely with civil society organizations, the Secretariat of the UN Geneva Office and the Bureau of the HRC to counter reprisals.
- Give visibility to affected communities and civil society, including women, Indigenous Peoples and LGBTQIA+ human rights defenders, and take concrete measures to protect, preserve and strengthen their participation in all formal and informal discussions and procedures at the HRC.
- Establish funds and/or provide technical assistance to local and national civil society organizations to enable them to better engage with the HRC, including through the provision of information and follow-up on implementation.

Normative Commitment and Leadership

- Ratify or accede to key treaties relevant to atrocity prevention, including the Genocide and Rome Statute, as well as align national laws with international obligations.
- Join or align with the Geneva-based Group of Friends of R2P, or if a member, actively support and participate to consolidate cross-regional support around R2P and its effective implementation.
- Apply a consistent, principled approach to all atrocity situations, regardless of political alliances.
- Consult all available materials on HRC candidates' human rights records and cooperation with the HRC and its mechanisms to inform voting. Even in closed slate elections, refrain from voting in favor of candidates that do not meet the membership criteria as stipulated in Resolution 60/251.
    - States should withhold votes – leave the box blank – for HRC candidates whose governments are responsible for mass atrocity crimes and/or refusing to cooperate with HRC mechanisms.
- Encourage other Council members to adhere to the membership obligations outlined in Resolution 60/251.

Bridging the Geneva–New York Gap

- Institutionalize regular reporting from HRC investigative mechanisms to the UNGA and UNSC, as well as formalize information-sharing channels to contribute to more timely and decisive responses in New York and Geneva.
- Support the UN Secretary-General in transmitting to the UNSC relevant decisions and reports by the HRC.
- Encourage the UNSC to request regular briefings by OHCHR and other relevant HRC mechanisms and procedures, including HRC-mandated investigative mechanisms for situations on the Council's agenda.
- Promote greater dialogue between human rights and peace and security agendas to ensure holistic UN responses.
- Make better use of OSAPG, including by requesting briefings from the Special Advisers on emerging or protracted crisis situations, drawing upon the Office's early warning analysis and recommendations for action and supporting the stronger integration of OSAPG into relevant HRC discussions.

Annex

Member State	R2P Group of Friends Member	Appointed R2P Focal Point	Universal Periodic Review	Genocide Convention	Rome Statute
Brazil	No	No	Next review: 2027 Previous review: November 2022	Ratified: 15 April 1952	Ratified: 20 June 2002
Burundi	No	No	Next review: 2028 Previous review: May 2023	Acceded: 6 January 1997	Withdrew: 27 October 2017
Dominican Republic	No	No	Next review: 2029 Previous review: May 2024	Signed: 11 December 1948	Ratified: 12 May 2005
Germany	Yes	Yes	Next review: 2028 Previous review: November 2023	Acceded: 24 November 1954	Ratified: 11 December 2000
Ghana	Yes	Yes	Next review: 2028 Previous review: January 2023	Acceded: 24 December 1958	Ratified: 20 December 1999
Ireland	Yes	Yes	Next review: November 2026 Previous review: November 2021	Acceded: 22 June 1976	Ratified: 11 April 2002
Japan	Yes	Yes	Next review: 2028 Previous review: January 2023	No	Acceded: 17 July 2007
Jordan	No	Yes	Next review: 2029 Previous review: January 2024	Acceded: 3 April 1950	Ratified: 11 April 2002
Kuwait	No	No	Next review: 2030 Previous review: May 2025	Acceded: 7 March 1995	Signed: 8 September 2000
Nepal	No	No	Next review: 2031 Previous review: January 2026	Ratified: 17 January 1969	No
Nigeria	Yes	Yes	Next review: 2029 Previous review: January 2024	Acceded: 27 July 2009	Ratified: 27 September 2001
Republic of Moldova	No	No	Next review: 2027 Previous review: January 2022	Acceded: 26 January 1993	Ratified: 12 October 2010
Ukraine	No	No	Next review: 2027 Previous review: November 2017	Ratified: 15 November 1954	Ratified: 25 October 2024
Uruguay	Yes	Yes	Next review: 2029 Previous review: May 2024	Ratified: 11 July 1967	Ratified: 28 June 2002
Zambia	No	No	Next review: 2028 Previous review: January 2023	Acceded: 20 April 2022	Ratified: 13 November 2002