

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

The Human Rights Council is the main inter-governmental body within the United Nations system responsible for addressing situations of human rights violations. The Council also receives thematic and country-specific reports from a series of independent expert mechanisms, including special procedures, as well as from the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Since the Council's inception in 2006, Human Rights Watch has been involved in strengthening its capacity to promote and protect human rights worldwide and be more responsive to the needs of victims of rights violations. We work to cast a light on the activities of the Council, hold its members accountable for their actions and advance compliance with its objective of addressing “situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations” around the world

+The Human Rights Council was created by the [General Assembly](#) on 15 March 2006 by its resolution [60/251](#), replacing the [Commission on Human Rights](#). The Council held its first session from 19 to 30 June 2006. A year later, the Council adopted resolution 5/1, its “[institution-building package](#)” to guide its work and set up its procedures and mechanisms. The 47 members of the Council are elected by the General Assembly.

Its mechanisms include the [universal periodic review](#), which serves to assess the situations of human rights in all States Members of the United Nations. The [Advisory Committee](#) serves as the Council's “think tank”, providing it with expertise and advice on thematic human rights issues. The [complaint procedure](#) allows individuals and organizations to bring human rights violations to the attention of the Council.

The Human Rights Council also works with its [special procedures](#), a mechanism originally established by the Commission on Human Rights. The special procedures are independent experts appointed by the Council – to mandates as special rapporteurs, independent experts, special representatives or members of working groups – to monitor, examine, advise and publicly report on thematic issues or situations of human rights in specific countries.

Review of the Council

When it established the Human Rights Council in March 2006, the General Assembly decided that it would review the Council's work and functioning after its first five years. More information about the review and its 2011 outcome are [available here](#).

Tenth anniversary

In June 2016, the Human Rights Council marked its tenth anniversary through [several events](#).

Efficiency measures

In an effort to uphold and increase its efficiency while addressing financial and time constraints, the Human Rights Council adopted President's statements at its

organizational sessions of [3 December 2018](#), [6 December 2019](#) and [7 December 2020](#), containing concrete measures.

The Human Rights Council in 2021

The Human Rights Council recorded one of its busiest years. Under the presidency of [Ambassador Nazhat S. Khan of Fiji](#) – the first held by a representative from a small island developing state in the Pacific – the Council continued to introduce innovations, break boundaries and set new human rights standards. It did this against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, which continued to disrupt countless lives and livelihoods around the world.

Innovations

In a landmark decision, the Human Rights Council adopted [a resolution in which it recognized the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment](#).

For the first time in its 15-year history, the Council:

- decided to allow delegates to vote remotely
- hosted the [largest number of dignitaries](#) ever to speak at its sessions
- supported the participation of 19 delegates from least developed countries and small island developing states through its [SIDS/LDCs Trust Fund](#)

Also for the first time, the Council held [five special sessions](#) in 2021 – again demonstrating its effectiveness in responding to urgent global crises. These concerned:

- [Myanmar](#)
- [the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and Israel](#)
- [Afghanistan](#)
- the [Sudan](#)
- [Ethiopia](#)

Activities

In 2021, the Human Rights Council extended the mandates of 17 special procedures and investigative bodies, and established seven new mandates:

- an accountability project on [Sri Lanka](#)
- a monitoring mission in [Belarus](#)
- a commission of inquiry on [the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and Israel](#)
- a special rapporteur for Afghanistan
- a [racial justice body addressing systemic racism in law enforcement around the globe](#)
- a special rapporteur on climate change
- an investigative body for Ethiopia

Throughout the year, the Council allowed some 260 civil society organizations to deliver more than 900 statements.

The Working Group on the [Universal Periodic Review](#) held three sessions, at which it reviewed the situation of human rights in 41 States. In addition, it held

several thematic forums, panel discussions and seminars between regular and special sessions.

