

**To the incoming President of the Human Rights Council, His Excellency Mr Federico Villegas, Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations Office at Geneva**

**CC:** His Excellency Mr Tamim Baiou (Libya), His Excellency Mr Ulugbek Lapasov (Uzbekistan), His Excellency Mr Andranik Hovhannisyan (Armenia), and Her Excellency Ms Katharina Stasch (Germany)

*25 January 2022*

**Re: Civil society's expectations for the Human Rights Council in 2022**

**Excellency,**

We, the undersigned human rights organisations, extend our congratulations on your election to lead the Human Rights Council (HRC) in its 16th cycle (1st January - 31 December 2022).

We also take this opportunity to congratulate and welcome His Excellency Mr Tamim Baiou (Libya), His Excellency Mr Ulugbek Lapasov (Uzbekistan), His Excellency Mr Andranik Hovhannisyan (Armenia), and Her Excellency Ms Katharina Stasch (Germany) as Vice Presidents of the Human Rights Council in 2022.

Since 2019, we have expressed our concerns regarding the Council's adoption of efficiency measures to address the UN's financial shortfalls and the COVID-19 pandemic that followed. Civil society organisations have consistently raised their concerns that the special emergency measures and budget constraints heavily restrict civil society participation in the work of the HRC.

In December 2021, despite an inconclusive evaluation of the impact of the measures adopted in the past two years, the Council decided to extend the efficiency measures and to evaluate their impact in December 2022. As we [highlighted then](#), civil society assessment of the impact of these measures should feature in the evaluation. As one of the primary stakeholders in the Human Rights Council, civil society participation in the consultations can only help provide an objective analysis of these measures.

As we have repeatedly stressed, the removal of General Debates from June sessions since 2020 has had a critical negative impact on NGO engagement. General Debates constitute the only opportunity for States and NGOs to address situations in countries that are not on the Council's agenda but should be.

This space is essential for the Council's ability to fulfil its prevention mandate, as States and NGOs can bring situations at imminent risk or mounting human rights crises to the Council's attention, and it is the only avenue to highlight the root causes of human rights violations occurring in countries not formally addressed by the Council as part of its programme of work.

The use of remote participation tools, such as video statements in all debates of the HRC, has proven to be an effective way to promote more flexibility and diverse and inclusive engagement, partly compensating the restrictions to in-person participation due to COVID-19-related limitations. The

enhanced participation of national civil society actors through video statements helps ensure that the HRC is informed by and responsive to human rights priorities and needs on the ground. While in-person presentation of statements will remain indispensable to the work of the Council, video statements serve as an important tool providing a space for under-resourced civil society actors who would otherwise not be able to attend the Council in-person, especially those who are not based in Geneva. As a long-standing demand of organisations, remote participation has made the HRC more inclusive and accessible, and changed the session dynamic for the better. For example, it has allowed victims and their families to speak to the HRC in General Debates.

As the Bureau plans for the year ahead, the undersigned organisations **take this opportunity to remind States and the Human Rights Council that civil society organisations are granted observer status, as per the Council's founding resolutions, UN practice, and the Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.**<sup>1</sup> **As observers of the Human Rights Council, we call on States to:**

1. Reinstate General Debates in all June sessions.
2. Remove the de facto cap on video participation during General Debates.
3. Maintain the possibility to engage remotely with the Council even after easing COVID-19 related measures.
4. Ensure budget transparency and accountability, including through meaningful consultations with civil society throughout the year.
5. Organise broad consultations with civil society representatives before taking decisions in relation to civil society participation and access to the Human Rights Council.
6. Establish a civil society focal point within the Bureau to facilitate the engagement of civil society organisations throughout the year, particularly with regard to issues that affect civil society participation, such as the evaluation of the efficiency measures and ongoing discussions relating to the 2021-2026 [question of the status of the Human Rights Council](#).

We wish you all the very best in the year ahead, and we hope that we can keep working together for a more accessible Human Rights Council.

Sincerely,

1. AKAHATA A.C.
2. Al-Haq, Law in the Service of Man
3. All Human Rights for All in Iran
4. American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)
5. Arc Association for the Defence of Human Rights of Azerbaijanis of Iran - ArcDH
6. ARTICLE 19
7. Asian Forum for Human Rights and Development (FORUM-ASIA)
8. Association for Progressive Communications - APC

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<sup>1</sup> See paragraph 11, UNGA resolution 60/251 (UN Doc. A/RES/60/251).

9. Association for the Human Rights of the Azerbaijani People in Iran-AHRAZ
10. Cairo Institute for Human Rights Studies
11. Center for Reproductive Rights
12. Centro de Estudios Legales y Sociales - CELS
13. Child Rights Connect
14. CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation
15. Conectas Direitos Humanos
16. CRAN - Carrefour de réflexion et d'action contre le racisme anti-Noir - Observatoire du racisme anti-Noir en Suisse
17. CREA
18. Federation for Women and Family Planning
19. Global Focus
20. Global Network of Sex Work Projects
21. Human Rights Activists in Iran (HRA)
22. Human Rights House Foundation
23. IFEX
24. International Bar Association's Human Rights Institute
25. International Commission of Jurists
26. International Lesbian and Gay Federation (ILGA World)
27. International Movement Against All Forms of Discrimination and Racism (IMADR)
28. International Planned Parenthood Federation
29. International Service for Human Rights (ISHR)
30. MENA Rights Group
31. National Lawyers Guild International Committee
32. Peace Brigades International
33. Plan International
34. Rede Nacional de Mulheres Negras no Combate à Violência
35. RFSU - Swedish Association for Sexuality Education
36. Sexual Rights Initiative
37. Together against the death penalty (ECPM)
38. UNESCO Inclusive Policy Lab - People of African Descent & the SDGs