

H.E. Mr. António Guterres
UN Secretary-General
United Nations
New York
U.S.A

22 March 2018, Geneva and London

Excellency,

The appointment of the new United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, due to take place later this year, is a vital moment for the United Nations, with implications for the human rights of millions of people around the world.

The new High Commissioner faces a world in which universal human rights norms are under threat or even in retreat, including in established democracies. The person appointed will have to confront global human rights challenges in the context of historic and on-going underfunding for the United Nation's human rights pillar – now dubbed by many as “the forgotten pillar”. Against this backdrop, the need for global leadership and international cooperation in the area of human rights is greater than ever.

It is therefore crucial that the most highly qualified candidate is selected who will be able to rise to the challenges of this demanding and important post. Under General Assembly resolution 48/141, the High Commissioner is expected to, *inter alia*:

- Monitor and speak out about human rights violations – ‘preventing the continuation of human rights violations throughout the world’;
- Act as the secretariat to the ‘competent bodies of the United Nations system in the field of human rights and [making] recommendations to them;’
- Provide capacity-building, advisory services and technical assistance, at the request of the State concerned, ‘with a view to supporting actions and programs in the field of human rights’;
- Engage in human rights diplomacy (‘dialogue’) with governments and ‘enhance international cooperation,’ in order to promote the implementation of international human rights obligations and commitments, and respect for human rights;
- Coordinate human rights mainstreaming across the UN system; and
- Make recommendations and driving efforts to ‘rationalize, adapt, strengthen and streamline the United Nations machinery in the field of human rights with a view to improving its efficiency and effectiveness.’

Additionally, given the pressure that civil society is under in many parts of the world, it is increasingly important that the High Commissioner be civil society's champion. The High Commissioner is in a unique position to guarantee civil society space, not just through words but also through actions (e.g. by meeting marginalised or at-risk groups and human rights defenders while on country missions).

In recent years, international organisations, including the UN, have made major improvements and reforms to recruitment processes to enhance the transparency and accountability of high-level appointments. Of course, your own appointment as UN Secretary-General benefited greatly from a fairer, more open and more inclusive process. For the credibility of the United Nations as well as the standing and authority of the next High Commissioner, it is imperative that a rigorous selection process is undertaken which meets the high standards now expected by governments, civil society and the general public – standards which are also enshrined as part of universal human rights norms.

In the opinion of the undersigned, a group of civil society organisations strongly committed to upholding the UN Charter and its values, the procedure adopted by the General Assembly in 1993 to appoint the High Commissioner can be enhanced – to make it more transparent, inclusive, meritocratic, and engaging for civil society and the general public. We believe this can be achieved in a manner consistent with existing UN documents, while avoiding politicisation and keeping the final decision in your independent hands.

Specific proposals for consideration should include: publishing a formal set of selection criteria; improving the global visibility of the formal call for candidatures; publishing a clear timetable for the selection process that enables adequate assessment of candidates; publishing an official list of candidates; and requiring all candidates to produce vision statements. We also believe, in the interests of transparency, inclusivity and public engagement, that the selection process should include wide consultation with all stakeholders, including civil society.

Such a process would, we believe, improve the authority, independence and credibility of the new High Commissioner, contribute to the existing reform agenda with regards to the revitalisation of the UN and, more broadly, improve the Organisation's global legitimacy.

Finally, we believe thought should be given to changing the mandate of the High Commissioner to a single non-renewable term of five years. This would help any new High Commissioner avoid political pressure and would strengthen her or his independence. We recognise that this would require bringing changes to the relevant General Assembly resolution, and should thus be carefully explored by the relevant actors.

As the United Nations celebrates the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights this year, we hope that you will seize this historic opportunity to bring the procedure for the selection of the High Commissioner more squarely into line with the high principles set down in that inspiring document, including by giving due consideration to the proposals outlined above. This will help ensure that the best and most qualified candidate is selected to become the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Yours sincerely,

Asian Human Rights Commission

Association for the Prevention of Torture

Association of Ukrainian Human Rights Monitors (UMDPL)

Avaaz

Bond · Society Building (United Kingdom)
Canadian Council for International Co-operation
Cecade (El Salvador)
Centre for Civil Liberties (Ukraine)
Child Rights International Network
CIVICUS
Coordinación de ONG y Cooperativas de Guatemala
Deca Equipo Pueblo (Mexico)
European Centre for Non-for-Profit Law
Fundación para la Paz y la Democracia
Freedom House
Geneva Infant Feeding Association
Fundacion Multitudes (Chile)
Helsinki Citizens' Assembly-Vanadzor (Armenia)
Human Rights Information Centre (Ukraine)
Index on Censorship (United Kingdom)
Institute of Social Sciences (India)
International Centre for Non-for-Profit Law
International Planned Parenthood Federation
Kharkiv Human Rights Protection Group (Ukraine)
National Forum for Voluntary Organizations (Sweden)
Network of Democrats in the Arab World
Open Estonia Foundation
Open Lithuania foundation
Quê Me: Vietnam Committee for Human Rights
Riksförbundet för Sexuell Upplysning - RFSU / The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education
Sexual Rights Initiative
Small Planet Institute
Solidarity Center (United States)
Survival
Tenaganita
The Right Livelihood Award Foundation
Transparency International Portugal
United Nations Association – UK (UNA-UK)
Universal Rights Group
World Movement for Democracy
Human Rights House Tbilisi on behalf of:

- Article 42 of the Constitution
- Georgian Centre for Psychosocial and Medical Rehabilitation of Torture Victims
- Human Rights Centre
- Media Institute
- Union Sapari – Family without violence

Human Rights House Azerbaijan (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Election Monitoring and Democracy Studies Center
- Legal Education Society
- Women’s Association for Rational Development

Human Rights House Belgrade (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Belgrade Centre for Human Rights
- Civic Initiatives
- Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Serbia
- Lawyers Committee for Human Rights
- Policy Centre

The Barys Zvozkau Belarusian Human Rights House (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Belarusian Association of journalists
- Belarusian Helsinki Committee
- Belarusian Language Society
- Belarusian PEN Centre
- Human Rights Centre Viasna
- Legal Initiative

Human Rights House Oslo (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- Health and Human Rights Info
- Human Rights House Foundation
- The Norwegian Tibet Committee

Human Rights House Yerevan (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- PINK Armenia
- Socioscope

Human Rights House Zagreb (on behalf of the following NGOs):

- B.a.B.e. Be active. Be emancipated.
- Center for Peace Studies
- Croatian Platform for International Citizen Solidarity – CROSOL
- Documenta - Center for Dealing with the Past