

Human Rights Council

The UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is the main UN body for strengthening, promoting and safeguarding Human Rights based in Geneva, Switzerland. It is designed as inter-governmental body and made up of 47 States. The member states are elected by UN General Assembly for a period of three years. As a matter of principle, all UN member states are eligible. However future members are elected according to regional groups (African States, Latin American and Caribbean States, Asian States, Eastern European states, Western Europe and other states). Furthermore, candidate states should meet several criteria, which include full cooperation with the UNHRC and maintaining highest standards in Human Rights promotion and commitment in the country itself.

UNHRC is a relatively young UN body, which was established by resolution 60/251 of UN General Assembly on 15 March 2006. It replaced the Commission on Human Rights and is a subsidiary organ of UN General Assembly. Therefore, it operates along the Rules of Procedure of UN General Assembly. The main tasks of UNHRC are “be[ing] responsible for promoting universal respect for the protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all”, “address[ing] situations of violations of human rights, including gross and systematic violations, and make recommendations thereon” and “effective coordination and the mainstreaming of human rights within the United Nations system” (A/RES/60/251).

So, UNHRC is not only shaped as a forum to discuss Human Rights, but as an agency for the effective promotion and implementation thereof. Following the initial establishment, several procedures and institutions were introduced. The main procedure is the “Universal Periodic Review” (UPR), having been decided upon in A/RES/60/251, too. UPR “is a unique process which involves a review of the human rights records of all 193 UN Member States once every four years” (UPR website). It is state-driven, but monitored by UNHRC. Each state has to declare which actions have been taken to improve the national situation of Human Rights and to document which commitments have been made to Human Rights obligations. According to the statutes of UPR, it is designed to ensure equal treatment for every UN member state in assessment of its Human Rights situation - regardless of power, size or population numbers. By the end of 2011, the Human Rights situation of all UN members will have been reviewed. We will shortly review the process of UPR here: three sessions of UPR are taking place each year, of which each is dedicated to 14 states. The result of each review is reflected in an “outcome report” listing the recommendations made to the state by the members of UNHRC under review including those that it accepted during session and which it will have to implement before the next review. So, the UPR is a full-circle process comprising three key stages: Review of the human rights situation of a state, implementation between two reviews (four years) of the recommendations accepted and voluntary pledges and commitments, reporting at the next review on the implementation of those recommendations and pledges and on the human rights situation in the country since the previous review.

Besides this important task, UNHRC meets regularly to discuss general Human Rights topics (such as the further promotion of Human Rights through several institutions and UN bodies), define next tasks for special procedure of UNHRC (such as working groups on several topics) and try to find solutions to urgent Human Rights problems (e.g. mass violations of Human Rights). UNHRC is able to adopt draft resolutions on topics discussed and submit them to UN General Assembly.

During MUIMUN, UNHCR will neither simulate UPR nor working on the tasks of special procedures, but discuss two generally important Human Right topics.