

Briefing given by the Secretariat on the Human Rights Council election
Wednesday, 19 April 2006, 3 to 4 p.m. (Economic and Social Council Chamber)

- After consultations with the Office of the President of the General Assembly, the Secretariat organized this briefing in view of the historic nature of the decision to create the new Human Rights Council and the need to explain the new process prior to the elections.
- The election will be held on Tuesday, 9 May 2006 at 10 a.m. in the General Assembly Hall.
- An information note under the symbol A/INF/60/6 has been circulated to all Member States to highlight key points of the election as provided for by resolution 60/251 of 15 March 2006 on the Human Rights Council. (Copies are also available in the Hall).
- The Information Note covers the composition of the Human Right Council, the candidatures, the voting procedure and the terms of membership.
- I will go through the subjects one by one. Thereafter, the floor will be open for questions.

Composition

- The composition of the membership is clearly spelled out in paragraph 7 of the resolution. There is no need to further elaborate.

Candidature

- The resolution stated that the membership of the Council shall be open to all Member States of the United Nations. Each Member State can choose to be a candidate. Therefore no nomination or endorsements by regional groups are necessary.
- Paragraph 8 of resolution 60/251 stipulates that when electing members of the Council, 'Member States shall take into account the contribution of candidates to the promotion and projection of human rights and their voluntary pledges and commitments made thereto'.
- To facilitate the sharing of information among Member States, and after consultation with the President of the General Assembly, a website has been created to list all the Member States which have chosen to inform the Secretariat of their candidature. To date, there are 55 Member States listed on the website, which is updated daily.

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- Because no provision was made in the resolution of how information should be shared, provisions for translation or distribution of any of the commitments received were not envisaged. To facilitate the process, the Secretariat opted to make the pledges and commitments available on the internet in the languages as received from Member States.
- Subsequently, we were requested by some member States to issue the pledges and commitments as official documents of the General Assembly. This now requires full translation into the six official languages. While we will do our utmost to meet that request, the time frame is extremely short and it is difficult to predict the actual workload expected. As of today, approximately 41 submissions were received, totaling close to 200 pages.
- Work has already begun on the ones received so far. It will be necessary to establish some guidelines in order to enable the Secretariat to issue the maximum number of commitments without unduly disrupting other work already in progress. Therefore, all pledges received by 1 May and comprised of 5 pages or less will be issued by 9 May. Those received after that cut-off date or that are excessive long will be issued in the language received for the elections, and issued in the remaining languages as soon as possible thereafter.
- Some delegations have informed the Secretariat only of their candidature without stating any pledges and commitments. Should those delegations wish to resubmit their communications for issuance, please contact the Secretariat. All communication should be addressed either to the President of the General Assembly or the Secretary-General, with a copy to the General Assembly Affairs Branch (Fax 1-212-963-4230).

Voting procedure

- As the resolution stated, the 47 members of the Council shall be elected directly and individually by secret ballot by the majority of the members of the General Assembly.
- As such, each vacancy will be balloted regardless of whether there are clean slates of candidates to the number of seats allotted to any region.
- As the resolution called for the election to be held in accordance with the relevant rules of procedure of the General Assembly on elections, rules 92 to 94 of the rules of procedure will therefore apply. /...
- The voting procedure is similar to elections that have been conducted in the General Assembly. Member States will be provided with one paper ballot for each region that has seats to be filled. On the ballot will be the number of blank lines corresponding to the number of seats to be filled. Member States will vote

by writing the names of the candidates of their choice (i.e. names of countries) from each region on the ballot of that region.

- For the first round, the balloting is open to all Member States, regardless if they have made known their candidature.
- The next three rounds are restricted rounds of balloting, meaning that for each vacant seat, Member States are restricted to cast their vote on one of two candidates that have obtained the largest number of votes in the previous ballot. For example, if there are two vacancies, there will only be four eligible candidates with the largest number of votes. Member States will vote for two out of the four. If there are three vacancies, then there will be six candidates eligible for the balloting.
- If after the three restricted rounds of balloting, there are still seats to be filled from any region, the candidature for the following three rounds of balloting will again be open to all Member States of that region for seats to be filled.
- Balloting will continue with the three rounds of restricted balloting, followed by three rounds of unrestricted balloting, until all 47 seats are filled.
- Any Member State that has obtained 96 votes will have met the requirement of the majority of the membership of the General Assembly and could be considered as elected unless in the unrestricted rounds of balloting, a situation occurs when there are more candidates that have obtained the required 96 votes than the number of seats to be filled. In this case, as is the practice of the General Assembly is to declare elected the ones with the largest number of votes, up to the number of seats to be filled. (As was done in General Assembly elections, a decision on this procedure will be taken at the beginning of the meeting.)

Terms of membership

- According to the resolution, the members of the Council will serve for a period of three years and, after two consecutive terms, they shall not be eligible for immediate reelection.
- While there is no clear guideline given by the resolution on the date of commencement of the term of office of the members, the Secretariat, after some consultations, suggested in the Information Note that they should begin on the day of the first meeting of the Council, which is set by the Assembly for 19 June 2006, and expires after three years thereafter. /...
- The General Assembly further decided that the term of membership shall be staggered and such decision shall be taken for the first election by the drawing of lots, taking into consideration equitable geographical distribution.

- In this connection, Members will find in the Information Note a table of the spread of the staggered terms that has been prepared in line with past practice. (A formal decision will be taken at the beginning of the plenary meeting on this matter.)
- When all 47 members have been elected, the President of the General Assembly will conduct the drawing of lots for the staggering terms, as part of the official plenary meeting. The mechanism is spelled out in the Information Note.
- All members are eligible for re-election for a full second term.