
HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL

Momentum maintained but weaknesses remain



Photo: UN/Jean-Marc Ferré

A lively scene at the United Nations Human Rights Council's 17th session as delegates hold up their plaques, requesting the floor.

The 17th session of the Human Rights Council (the Council) was an important measure of whether the shifting dynamics observed at the 16th session, following on in large part from the events of the 'Arab Spring', would be sustained. Those events had given momentum to a trend whereby States had begun to show a willingness to set regional and national interests at least a little to one side, demonstrated by the engagement of troubled States with the Council, such as Tunisia and Côte d'Ivoire, and a readiness on the part of many other States to reach across regional groups to work on joint initiatives. In general the 17th session (30 May - 17 June 2011) did build on the achievements of the March session, with some particularly striking developments.

The undoubted highlight of the session was the adoption of a resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity, led by South Africa, with the active support of the Group of Latin American and Caribbean Countries (GRULAC) and backed by the Western European and Others Group (WEOG). Not only is this the first time the United Nations (UN) has adopted a resolution that focuses specifically on human rights related to sexual orientation and gender identity, but the leadership demonstrated by the 'Global South' on this matter is yet another indication that the old dynamics of the Council continue to shift.

The 17th session also saw the Council sustain the deeper engagement in country situations noted at the 16th session. Follow-up debates were held on the situations in Libya, Syria and Côte d'Ivoire; a short procedural decision was adopted on Yemen, inviting the High Commissioner to present her report on Yemen to the Council; and resolutions were adopted on Kyrgyzstan and Belarus.

However, these generally positive developments were offset by the Council's continued failure to approach all situations with the same degree of concern. The most striking omission has been the failure of the Council to address the situation in Bahrain and its continued silence with respect to Sri Lanka. On the thematic front, a disappointment was the failure of Canada to insist on the inclusion of language relating to sexuality-based violence against women in the resolution on violence against women.

Despite these low points, the session overall can be considered successful. This article provides an overview of developments at the 17th session, but does not attempt to discuss the session exhaustively. For more detailed information see the report of the session, UN press releases, and ISHR news stories published throughout the session.¹

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

Following the adoption by the Council of the review of its work and functioning at the previous session, the 17th session saw the adoption of two follow-up decisions. The first concerned the revised modalities for the second cycle of the UPR, which will begin in June 2012. According to that decision, the second cycle of the review will follow the same order of countries as for the first, with provision made that the length of a review 'could' be extended to three and a half hours. Additionally, steps are taken with this decision to ensure that all States, both members and observers, who wish to speak during the review are able to do so, by cutting speaking time to as short as necessary to accommodate all inscribed speakers.

¹ The report of the session containing details about the proceedings and co-sponsors is available at <http://bit.ly/pRh1EO>; United Nations press releases at <http://bit.ly/btifvi>; ISHR stories at www.ishr.ch/council. You can also find the full list of resolutions and decisions adopted, and voting records, at <http://bit.ly/rqSK9k>.

The decision also emphasised that the second and subsequent cycles should focus on, amongst other things, the implementation of accepted recommendations in the State under review. The specific highlighting of accepted recommendations does not preclude revisiting rejected recommendations, and it is important that the second cycle does not neglect those recommendations. Instead, States should be encouraged to accept them in subsequent cycles. Nevertheless, the explicit emphasis on implementation of accepted recommendations could restrict the way in which States approach the upcoming cycle. It is crucial that States do not narrow the scope of the UPR by losing sight of the bigger picture within a country – which includes the thornier issues States under review are likely to not accept. The UPR should not become a means for following up only on accepted recommendations, which would allow States under review to limit the scope of their human rights obligations.

The second decision to follow from the review of the Council establishes an Office of the President of the Council. The stated purpose of the creation of such an office is not only to provide the President with secretarial and drafting support, but also to ensure that institutional memory is retained within the office from one President to the next. However the selection of staff and their management remains the responsibility of each President, and while the resolution 'strongly encourages' an incoming President to retain one or more staff from his or her predecessor's office, it remains to be seen how far this new office will actually improve the Council's institutional memory. The office is to be operational no later than the seventh cycle of the Council, which will begin in January 2013.

COUNTRY SITUATIONS

Coherent follow-up to Commissions of Inquiry

Generally, the 17th session continued along the trend set at the March session, with the Council as a whole and also individual States demonstrating willingness to commit to longer-term engagement in country situations and ensure adequate follow-up. The session saw reports by the Commissions of Inquiry set up to investigate the situations in Libya and Côte d'Ivoire, following the special sessions held on each country.²

In both cases, the Council established some form of follow-up mechanism. While in the case of Libya the mandate of the Commission of Inquiry was continued, for Côte d'Ivoire the Council established an Independent Expert on the situation in the country, notably with the support of Côte d'Ivoire itself. However, although in theory the creation of a new special procedure marks the Council's use of a stronger tool than a Commission of Inquiry, the mandate of the new Independent Expert is restricted to follow up on the recommendations made in the report of the Commission of Inquiry. Although

the recommendations lack in specificity and in that sense limit the Independent Expert in his or her tasks, they substantively cover all of the most important themes. It will therefore be key to find a qualified and independent mandate holder with the capacity to interpret his or her mandate in a broad manner.

Mixed results on Middle East protests

Côte d'Ivoire's cooperation was not mirrored by the actions of Syria, also considered at a recent special session.³ Syria has refused to allow access to the fact-finding mission established to investigate allegations of human rights violations in the country, as a result of which the Commission was unable to report to the June session. Another sign that individual States are attempting to find innovative solutions and taking more responsibility in ensuring the implementation of the Council's clear mandate was a strong cross-regional joint statement on behalf of 54 States. It called for Syria to cooperate with the fact-finding mission, condemning the Government's failure to respond to the calls from the Council, the High Commissioner, and the UN Secretary-General's Special Advisers on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect to 'respect the will of its people and to implement reforms'.

Notably, 73 States (comprising the EU and Arab Group) delivered a joint statement on the situation in Yemen, with the support of the Government of Yemen, commending the Government for its promise of free access to the High Commissioner's mission to the country, and calling on the High Commissioner to ensure that her report contains recommendations for addressing the situation in Yemen directed both to the Government and the international community. A short procedural decision was adopted, requesting the High Commissioner to report back to the Council in September on the results of her visit to Yemen. While this is the minimum that could be expected, the adoption of the decision at least puts the situation in Yemen on the Council's agenda, and provides human rights defenders with an opportunity to follow-up and report on further developments.

An initiative by Switzerland, on the promotion and protection of human rights in the context of peaceful protest, presented an opportunity to go some way towards redressing the failure of the Council to attend to recent repression of peaceful protest in several countries in the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) and beyond. Ideally, this initiative could have been used to establish a strong mechanism whereby the High Commissioner could report on such cases of repression. However, the decision by the Council fell short of this goal, requiring only that a panel debate take place in September and that the High Commissioner produce a report on it. The panel will permit human rights defenders from countries beyond the MENA region, who have witnessed recent political protests and repression, to have their voices heard by the international community. However, it is unfortunate that the decision restricts the initiative of the High Commissioner to

² See ISHR news stories on the Commission of Inquiry on Libya at <http://bit.ly/qzYfPm> and on the special session on Libya at <http://bit.ly/n57szz>.

³ See ISHR news story at <http://bit.ly/qor502>.

investigate and report on all situations of widespread human rights violations in the context of protests.

Silence on Bahrain and Sri Lanka

Unfortunately, these positive engagements do not point to an across-the-board improvement from the Council. The Council's weaknesses remain, as evident in the case of Bahrain, which has been consistently ignored by the Council despite the on-going violations and deteriorating situation. The Council's failure to address the situation reveals how important the political will of member States remains if action is to be taken. In this particular case, the US, which has taken a strong leadership role in many similar situations, has been reluctant to speak out against its political ally. During the general debate under Item 4 the US pointed to the Bahraini Government as having responsibility to ensure accountability, thereby implicitly claiming that the Government still has the necessary legitimacy to do so and effectively denying a role for the Council to step in.

In the case of Sri Lanka the Council continues to maintain its silence, despite the best efforts of human rights defenders, the High Commissioner, and special procedures to ensure the continued visibility of the magnitude of the violations suffered by the people of Sri Lanka. At this session the Council heard an appeal from the High Commissioner to reflect on the new information included in the report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Experts on Sri Lanka,⁴ which concludes that allegations of serious international crimes by both Government forces and the Tamil Tigers are credible, and to keep in mind its mandate to combat impunity worldwide. The Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions added his voice to the growing condemnation of Sri Lanka, affirming that video evidence of alleged human rights violations in the country have now been sufficiently verified to show that serious international crimes have been committed.⁵

Small steps in relation to Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Somalia

Other developments included the European Union's (EU) attempt to establish a mandate on the situation in Belarus. Although the EU at first persisted in pushing through the special procedure, in the end they opted for an incremental approach to the situation in Belarus. This built more cross regional support, including from the Maldives, Uruguay, Chile, and Argentina, who were reluctant to support the establishment of a special rapporteur. The resolution was adopted by a vote of 21 in favour, 19 against and 5 abstentions. This represents almost no shift from when the resolution was last adopted by the Commission on Human Rights in 2004.⁶

4 For the full text of the High Commissioner's address to the Council see <http://bit.ly/pKqtpd>.

5 See ISHR news story at <http://bit.ly/rpxSad>.

6 On that occasion the voting was 23 in favour, 13 against and 17 abstentions, with four States voting differently at the Council's 17th session

The Council resolution requests the High Commissioner to monitor the situation following the December 2010 elections, report orally to the 18th session of the Council, and produce a comprehensive written report by the 20th session to be the basis of an interactive dialogue.

The Council also adopted resolutions on Kyrgyzstan, renewing the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights' (OHCHR) mandate to continue to provide technical assistance, and on Somalia, renewing the mandate of the Independent Expert on the situation in Somalia and requesting OHCHR to provide technical and financial assistance for implementation of the country's UPR recommendations.

Sudan: serious challenges for protection of civilians as South Sudan celebrates independence

The protection of civilians remains one of the most pressing challenges since South Sudan marked its independence on 9 July 2011.

Following violence that erupted in Abyei⁷ in May, the Security Council adopted a resolution (the Resolution) establishing an interim security force in the area for six months, consistent with the 20 June 2011 agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Government of South Sudan.⁸

Mr. Mohamed Chande Othman, the Human Rights Council's Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan, warned in March that the deteriorating situation in Abyei could derail the entire peace process.⁹ The UN Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) established by the Resolution will be composed of 4,200 Ethiopian troops. It follows a previous deployment of troops drawn from the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS), which however failed to provide adequate protection to civilians. While the Resolution was a welcome development from a protection standpoint, it fell short insofar as it does not provide for specific monitoring and reporting on the situation of human rights to the Human Rights Council. Close cooperation between Mr Chande Othman and UNISFA will be essential to allow the Council to follow human rights developments on Abyei.

than in 2004. Notably, despite the EU's flexibility in supporting an incremental approach as requested by GRULAC States, Mexico and Guatemala both changed their vote from a 'yes' to abstention. Gabon went in the opposite direction, voting 'yes' on the Council resolution having abstained on the Commission's resolution, while the Ukraine, which had voted 'no' in 2004, was absent at the latest vote (abstention).

7 Abyei is an oil-rich area that straddles north and south Sudan and is claimed by both sides. According to a 2005 peace agreement, Abyei is supposed to be administered by a committee of northern and southern Sudanese.

8 <http://bit.ly/ejpVc2>.

9 See UN news story at <http://bit.ly/mExahG>.

The Resolution follows a forceful Presidential Statement¹⁰ on 3 June 2011 demanding the withdrawal of the Government of Sudan and its military elements from the disputed area, and a 22 May 2011 press statement.¹¹ The press statement condemned the attack by Southern forces and subsequent escalation of military operations by Sudanese Armed Forces, who took control of Abyei on 21 May 2011. The Independent Expert echoed those concerns, strongly urging parties to the conflict to ensure the protection of civilians at all times.¹²

The Presidential Statement also expressed deep concern about tensions in the Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan states, calling on both parties to resume discussions on post 9 July security arrangements; it also mentions the structures set up by the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005. However, the security and humanitarian situation in South Kordofan and Blue Nile has deteriorated significantly since then. Some progress was achieved with a 28 June 2011 framework agreement, calling for the formation of a Joint Political Committee to address all relevant issues related to the contested border states.¹³

One week prior to the independence of South Sudan, the future of UN-mandated peacekeeping missions in Sudan and South Sudan remained unresolved. The Government of Sudan demanded that UNMIS leave the North by 9 July 2011, while South Sudan requested a continued UN presence. Beyond UNISFA, the Security Council underlined the need for a continued UN presence, in particular in South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and along the north-south border. Civil society organisations called on the Security Council to ensure that any new missions make protection of civilians a clear priority, via a Chapter VII mandate.¹⁴

The Secretary General, on his part, recommended a three month rollover in his report,¹⁵ to allow UNMIS to downsize in Khartoum and begin the transition to a United Nations Mission in Southern Sudan (UNMISS). The Secretary General recommended that UNMISS be established under Chapter VI of the UN Charter but also include a Chapter VII mandate to provide protection of civilians.¹⁶ In the meantime, the Human Rights Council has not yet decided on the implications of an independent South Sudan for the mandate of the Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in the Sudan or the Universal Periodic Review.

10 A Presidential Statement reflects the consensus of the Council's 15 members but is not legally binding. S/PRST/2011/12 available at <http://bit.ly/kPXfoG>.

11 SC/10262 available at <http://bit.ly/rdyTuj>.

12 Statement of the Independent Expert available at <http://bit.ly/jP5qKE>.

13 Framework agreement available at <http://bit.ly/l3JS9S>.

14 Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter allows the Security Council to 'determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression' and to take military and non-military action to 'restore international peace and security'.

15 S/2011/314 available at <http://bit.ly/e5zliT>.

16 Para. 41, S/2011/314.

Unable to negotiate even a gradual downsizing of UNMIS, the Council adopted a resolution on its withdrawal on 11 July 2011, stating UNMIS would end effective from that day. The resolution requested the transfer of appropriate staff and supplies from UNMIS to UNMISS and UNISFA. In addition, the resolution requested the Secretary-General to consult with 'the parties, the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel and other partners' and present options to support security arrangements in Blue Nile and South Kordofan.

THEMATIC

Landmark advance on sexual orientation and gender identity

The most striking thematic development was the adoption of the resolution 'Discrimination and violence on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity'.¹⁷ In itself, the resolution is relatively minimalist, requesting a report commissioned by the High Commissioner, documenting discriminatory laws and practices and acts of violence against individuals on the basis of their sexual orientation and gender identity. It also sets up a panel discussion to be held at the 19th session of the Council to discuss the findings of the report and follow up.

Placed into historical context, however, the adoption of this resolution is remarkable. At the 16th session a joint statement on sexual orientation and gender identity had been presented to the Council. This joint statement was seen by many defenders working on the issue of sexual orientation and gender identity, and States friendly to the issue, as a step in the direction of an eventual resolution on the subject. Nevertheless at that stage a resolution still remained only a distant possibility. Also at the 16th session, however, South Africa tabled what was apparently a negative initiative, proposing the creation of an intergovernmental working group as the exclusive forum for discussing issues relating to sexual orientation and gender identity.¹⁸ This prompted the US to propose a counter-resolution, in an attempt either to get South Africa to withdraw its resolution, or to reduce some of the negative impact of South Africa's initiative. There were worrying indications that the debate on sexual orientation and gender identity would return to the very divisive phase it had been trapped in at the time of the Commission on Human Rights.¹⁹

However, in the course of the 17th session, South Africa surprised many by demonstrating a commendable willingness to engage with civil society, to listen to concerns, and to reverse the entire import of its resolution in consequence. The sustained engagement of South African human rights defenders in Cape Town, and subsequently Geneva, was particularly

17 *Resolution 17/19*, available at <http://bit.ly/q2ew4l>.

18 See ISHR's *Human Rights Monitor Quarterly*, issue 2/2011 at <http://bit.ly/qWvR6x>.

19 For more information on the background to this resolution, see <http://bit.ly/kkmHM3>.

noteworthy. Their advocacy was a success in the way it connected defenders' national level concerns with the Council's actions at an international level, resulting in South Africa presenting a resolution with the full backing of national human rights defenders.

The fact that the resolution was led by South Africa, with the active participation of members of GRULAC, in particular, Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, and Uruguay, in the negotiations marks a welcome assumption of a leadership role on this issue by countries from the 'Global South'. With issues of sexual orientation and gender identity often portrayed as a Western import, this leadership was significant. South Africa placed itself in a particularly difficult position, isolating itself from most of its African Group colleagues. During the informal negotiations on the draft text, this isolation was marked through the absence of almost all of the African Group and Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC).²⁰ During the adoption, however, the harsh criticism South Africa faced from Nigeria (claiming to speak on behalf of the African Group) revealed the high level of resolve that South Africa required to maintain its position. Its strong breakaway from the regional group is a welcome sign that the dominance of those groups is not unshakeable. Similarly, the OIC presented an almost unified position, providing a string of explanations of vote at the adoption (including from Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Qatar, and Mauritania). The only State to distance itself from this position was Burkina Faso, member of both the OIC and African Group, which abstained in the vote.

The resolution was adopted with 23 votes in favour, 19 against and 3 abstentions.²¹ Mauritius also broke from the African Group by voting in favour, while Burkina Faso, Zambia and China abstained, and Kyrgyzstan was absent. In explanations after the vote, Mauritius noted that while it respected Nigeria's position on the resolution and its position as leader of the African Group, in this particular case its own position was 'more nuanced'.

The lack of engagement by almost all members of the African Group and OIC in the informal negotiations and the strong opposition expressed at the adoption by many members of these groups, may hamper the High Commissioner's efforts to gain their cooperation when she undertakes the commissioned study on violations and discrimination suffered on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. It is not unlikely that this almost complete disengagement by some States was an effort to reduce the legitimacy of the resolution and its outcomes. A similar lack of engagement could be expected during the panel discussion at the 19th session.

Sliding back on violence against women

In the midst of this success, the dropping of language relating to sexuality-based violence from the draft resolution on violence against women, focusing on protection, was disappointing. The phrase had been a source of debate throughout informal consultations on the resolution. Despite sustained pressure on the sponsors, Canada, to retain the language it was in the end removed in favour of progressing with the resolution on a less contentious footing. Canada's weak position on this point is all the more disheartening when set against the strong and inspirational leadership shown by South Africa, regarding the resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity, in the face of consistent and even virulent opposition from its own regional group. Nevertheless, the text of the violence against women resolution is on the whole substantive. As this is part of a cycle of three resolutions, the first having focused on prevention, this year's on protection, and the third on remedies, Canada may also be able to address the omission in this resolution by including it in the final one of the series.

OTHER SIGNIFICANT DEBATES AND OUTCOMES

The Council also held a panel discussion entitled 'Strengthened international efforts to foster a global dialogue for the promotion of a **culture of tolerance** and peace at all levels, based on respect for human rights and diversity of religions and beliefs'.²² The discussion was required as part of the adoption of a resolution on combating intolerance against persons on the basis of religion, led by Pakistan at the 16th session and supported by all States, which replaced the long-standing resolution on defamation of religions. The panel marked an opportunity to clarify the implications of the new resolution and the move beyond the noxious 'defamation of religions' debate. While there were many positive points about the panel and the debate, including the fact that it was a consensus initiative, the panel did not mark the clear-cut watershed moment that could have been hoped for. In particular, Iran made an outspoken intervention in which it continued to identify 'defamation of religions' with incitement to hatred. Cuba too included 'defamation' and 'ideological discrimination' as part of the discrimination that needed to be addressed. Although the panel marked a step in the right direction, more work needs to be done to consolidate the rejection of 'defamation of religions' as a concept at the international level for addressing religious intolerance.

The Secretary-General's report on **reprisals** against those who have cooperated or sought to cooperate with representatives of UN human rights bodies, due to be discussed at the 17th session, could not be presented for 'technical reasons'. The delay is testament to the general lack of urgency with which the Council approaches the issue of reprisals.²³

20 With the exception of Egypt, which engaged in some of the earlier consultations, primarily to express its belief that the concepts of sexual orientation and gender identity need defining.

21 The full voting record can be found here: <http://bit.ly/mWdmzX>.

22 See ISHR news story at <http://bit.ly/rcVcgP>.

23 The issue was the subject of discussion at a side event organised by

The **renewal of several special procedures mandates**, in particular the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers and the Special Rapporteur on extra-judicial, summary or arbitrary executions, represented an opportunity to consolidate the increasing recognition of reprisals as an issue with the potential to undermine the Council's functioning, as implied in the outcome of the Council's review process.²⁴ The inclusion of specific language relating to reprisals against those who cooperate with special procedures would have operationalised the general condemnation of reprisals by the Council. However, the general trend to renew special procedures mandates on the basis of previous resolutions may have blocked progress in this respect. The mandates were both adopted without a vote.

The mandate on **human rights and transnational corporations** was also renewed, but the post of Special Representative of the Secretary-General will be replaced by a Working Group. However, the mandate of the Working Group focuses almost exclusively on the implementation of the Guiding Principles developed by the outgoing mandate holder, Mr John Ruggie. This is despite concerns raised, both during the informal consultations on this mandate and during the interactive dialogue with Mr Ruggie, that the Guiding Principles should not be seen as the end point when it comes to implementation of the Respect, Protect and Remedy Framework.²⁵

Other thematic mandates renewed were:

- Special Rapporteur on trafficking in persons, especially in women and children
- Special Rapporteur on the human rights of migrants
- Independent Expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty
- Independent Expert on human rights and international solidarity

New complaints mechanism for children's rights violations

On 17 June, the Council adopted the final draft Optional Protocol to the *Convention on the Rights of the Child* on a communications procedure for children's rights violations. Read more about this development on page 27.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS

The apparent change in dynamics observed at the 16th session of the Council continued to manifest itself at the June session. South Africa's leadership in the face of opposition from its regional group was extremely positive. It is hoped South Africa will continue to assert itself in this way and that its principled stance may set an example for other States within the African Group. This

ISHR during the session. See <http://bit.ly/nnz1A8>.

24 See para. 30 of the *Outcome of the review of the work and functioning of the Human Rights Council*, at <http://bit.ly/fb258h>.

25 See ISHR news piece at <http://bit.ly/pTfruq>.

may also help to reduce the stranglehold that regional and political groups often hold on Council deliberations.

In other cases, however, there was less clear breaking from old regional and political ties. In this regard, Egypt's role at this session had been watched with great interest following the change of government there. It was hoped the delegation would play a more positive role. A strong opening statement set the bar high, with Egypt saying human rights would be placed at the centre of the ongoing transformation in the country. However, this rhetoric did not translate into particularly positive behaviour during the rest of the session. Egypt was, for example, the only African State to engage, albeit briefly, in consultations on the resolution on sexual orientation and gender identity – taking the negative position that this was a new concept and in need of definition. The delegation also played a negative role in discussions on the violence against women resolution. However, Egypt did support the decision on peaceful protests, although the weakness of the initiative does not make it a good test of Egypt's commitment to the human rights of its people.

It should also be kept in mind that, while the greater commitment demonstrated by the Council to engage in country situations is to be welcomed, it has also resulted in an unprecedented level of pressure on OHCHR, both financially and in terms of human resources. There were 12 resolutions at this session that called for additional work on the part of OHCHR, all 'within existing resources'. This is part of an upwards trend and as such is unsustainable.²⁶ It is up to States to ensure that the financial resources are available to ensure decisions taken by the Council can be implemented effectively, and adverse effects on OHCHR's other areas of work are avoided.

Finally, the session marked the end of the 5th cycle of the Council and the end of the tenure of the Ambassador of Thailand, Mr Sihasek Phuangketkeow. The incoming President is Ms Laura Dupuy Lasserre, the Ambassador of Uruguay, and the first woman President. She will serve for a period of 18 months, to enable the Council to bring its cycle into line with the calendar year. This extended term puts Ms Dupuy Lasserre in the unique position of having more time than any other President to develop plans and bring innovative ideas to fruition. In particular, it is hoped she will capitalise on this opportunity to consolidate the positive developments of recent sessions. ■

26 In her address at the Organisational Meeting for the Council's 6th cycle, the High Commissioner stated that while OHCHR welcomes the activism of the Council, the \$9.5 million budget required, half of which is to be supported by OHCHR, places the Office in a difficult position. She noted, for example, that OHCHR is still trying to absorb the costs of the original mandate of the Commission of Inquiry into Libya and is now faced with the renewal of that mandate. She urged State representatives in Geneva to work closely with colleagues in New York to ensure that the Council's work is backed by financial resources from New York. Available at <http://bit.ly/qXfaXJ>.