

[Human Rights Council: New President and Bureau must protect civil society space](#)

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(Geneva) - The newly elected President and Vice-Presidents of the UN Human Rights Council have both an opportunity and an obligation to ensure that the Council is a safe and accessible place for human rights defenders and victims of human rights violations, the International Service for Human Rights said today.

At an organisational meeting held in Geneva today, the Ambassador of Germany, Joachim R cker, was elected as President of the Human Rights Council for 2015.

The Ambassadors of Albania, Botswana, Kazakhstan and Paraguay were elected as Vice-Presidents of the Council, each drawn from a geographic region. Both the President and Vice-Presidents are elected and serve in their individual and not national capacities.

Addressing the Council following Ambassador R cker's appointment, ISHR's Michael Ineichen said, 'You take office at a time when the world is not only witness to a range of serious human rights crisis, but at a moment when the United Nations human rights protection system itself is under increasing pressure.'

'Within this context, the role of the Council as the world's peak multilateral human rights body is ever more crucial and its impact is intrinsically linked to the safe and unhindered participation of civil society and human rights defenders in its work,' Mr Ineichen said.

With ongoing efforts by some States to [close the space for civil society participation](#) at the UN and by others to [intimidate and prevent victims and human rights defenders from cooperating with the UN](#), Mr Ineichen that the new President and Bureau has both an opportunity and an obligation 'to ensure that the Council is a safe and accessible place within which human rights defenders can exercise their rights to freedom of expression, to expose human rights violations and to seek accountability for victims and affected communities'.

'We congratulate the Ambassador of Germany on his much deserved appointment to this crucial post and look forward to working closely and collaboratively with him and his Bureau to strengthen the Human Rights Council and to support those who turn to it for protection and justice,' Mr Ineichen said.

ISHR's statement to the Council comes just weeks after the organisation published a [high-level legal advice](#) prepared by Sir Nicolas Bratza, Professor Egbert Myjer and leading international law firm Freshfields on the legal obligations of the Council, its President and Bureau to take concrete steps to prevent and promote accountability for reprisals against those who cooperate with the UN.

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