

[Principles over politics: Strengthening the membership and impact of the Human Rights Council](#)

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By Peter Matt, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the UN in Geneva

A more principled approach to electing members to the Human Rights Council, adequate resourcing for the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, and enhanced access and protection for civil society are the essential ingredients for a more effective Council with a more positive impact on the ground, says Peter Matt.

Strengthening the rule of law and protecting human rights are guiding principles of Liechtenstein's foreign policy. Our thematic priorities within the promotion of human rights are the rights of women and children as well as the fight against torture and the death penalty. We are also strongly committed to strengthening the international human rights structures and mechanisms and to combating impunity for the most serious violations of human rights. In this regard the Human Rights Council (the Council) has achieved some significant success in strengthening the protection of human rights, preventing violations, promoting accountability as well as addressing critical situations of human rights violations.

Yet while we celebrate the tenth anniversary of this body, human rights violations around the globe continue to persist. Conflicts and situations of violence are on the rise, and instability seems to have become the new normality. It is therefore of utmost importance that we measure the quality of the Council by the degree to which we discharge the responsibility to address specific human rights emergencies. The 10th anniversary marks a significant opportunity to reflect on how to enhance the Council.

Strengthening membership

When founding the Council, the General Assembly set out the principles for members of the Council as well as for the electing States. Liechtenstein strategically monitors whether Council members uphold the highest standards in protecting human rights and fully cooperating with the Council. These observations are regularly

brought up in the form of recommendations during the Universal Periodic Reviews of Council members.

When deciding who to vote for, Liechtenstein fully takes into account the contributions and commitments a candidate has made in protecting human rights. Unfortunately, far too often, electors turn a blind eye to these principles and trade their votes for elections to other human rights bodies. We need to discuss, also with civil society actors, how electors can play a more responsible role which is in line with the principles set forth by the General Assembly a decade ago. An interesting option to discuss would be for members to pledge not to vote for candidates whom do not comply with the principles set forth by the General Assembly in the Council's founding documents.

Securing resources for implementation

Another key challenge we are confronted with is the serious lack of funding of the Council, its mechanisms and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. This is a severe impediment to the effective implementation of resolutions, recommendations and advices at the national level. This affects not only the Council, but the United Nations as a whole: with one of the three pillars of the UN severely underfunded, its mission as a whole is at stake. We should therefore work together to address the irresponsible funding shortfall.

In this regard, we call upon the Secretary-General to recognise the unique situation of the Office in the UN's budget planning. Liechtenstein is the largest per capita donor to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and has been a longstanding supporter of the human rights pillar of the UN. To address this financial implementation gap, we doubled our core annual contribution to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. But we also need to encourage members of the Council to redouble their financial efforts.

Supporting and safeguarding civil society

In founding the Human Rights Council, the General Assembly stipulated that the Council shall work in close cooperation with civil society. And indeed, civil society is a valuable and indispensable partner to our work. In Liechtenstein we have a well-established regular dialogue between the Government and civil society. We are convinced that these actors are essential partners who enable us to incorporate different voices and perspectives in our human rights deliberations.

In order to fulfil the Council's mandate, potential Council members should strongly advocate for an even more accessible and protective space for civil society. It is unacceptable that reprisals against persons who cooperate with the Council and its mechanisms persist and have become even more severe over time. Efforts to counter these intolerable incidents have been made, but we need also a more resolute and united response from Member States of the Council, including the long-overdue creation of a senior focal point on reprisals.

The next ten years

I consider the Council's tenth anniversary as an important event to reflect on how to enhance the quality of the membership of the Council sustainably. More frank and open discussions with the goal of producing concrete outputs are needed to enhance the quality and impact of the Council. Even more importantly, we need sincere commitments on financing the UN human rights system and on strengthening the space of civil society actors.

Peter C Matt is Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein to the UN in Geneva